

THE WIRE

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sounding off

News, live events, happenings...

Compiled by
Rob Young

News items
should reach us by
Thursday 5 May
for inclusion in the
June issue



Pharoah

Photo: Stuart House

The London Jazz Festival

dominates this month, over 11 days (12-22 May), at different venues, the Festival is really a banner covering several extremes and directions in creative music. Of special interest — from where we're standing — are Pharoah Sanders (15-19, Dingwalls), 'Over The Edge' with Carla Bley, Anthony Braxton

And The Creative Jazz Orchestra, Jack DeJohnette, Trio Clusone, Billy Jenkins and others (15, Sadlers Wells), saxophonist Joshua Redman (16-21, Ronnie Scott's), Japanese Hip-hop from all-female Nenes (16, Bloomsbury Theatre), Louis Moholo, John Law and Grand Union (19, Union Chapel), Township Jazz with Mervyn Africa (20, UC), Blue Note Freedom Jazz Dance (21, UC), Yusuf Lateef (22, UC), as well as numerous dance events, workshops, discussions and education sessions. For information on the whole bangshoot, phone 071 437 4797. Turn to page 74 to WIN SEASON TICKETS for all events at the Bloomsbury Theatre and Hackney Empire.

Festival Alternative # One: New Aura, a three day LMC event self contained within the festival (at Creative Block, East Road, North London), brings in squeeze box operated samples from gsmologist Nicolas Collins to play with Peter Cusack and Matt Ward of Stock, Hausen & Walkman (12), Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth providing a live soundtrack to a multitechnic road movie by Leah Singer (13), and Fluxus prime mover Tony Conrad, who'll be showcasing old and new work (14). Die, Trip Computer! Die! ('Cyberpunk's answer to The Incredible String Band') provide 'Indescribable audio visual experiences' on all three nights. Tickets are £6 (£5 concs) or £15 (£10) for all three, advance purchase recommended (cheques payable to LMC Ltd, 60 Farringdon Rd, London EC1R, details on 071 490 2119).

Alternative # Two: The Polar Bear Club (19 May, Sutton House, Hackney, East London) takes place among slides and X-rays created by artist Stephen Nicholas, and features improv from Lol Coxhill & Pat Thomas, Conspiracy, and Seattle saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan. Also poetry readings and a Polar Bear workshop (£4/£2, nng 081 531 8949) during the day. Tickets are £6 (£4 concs), from 081 986 2264 (Sutton House), Bear facts from 0865 516929).

Alternative # Three: The parrainismo (sic) Club (at The King's Head, Upper Street, North London) Two days, four groups. On 15 May: Antics (Oliver York, Julia Doyle et al) and Dreamtime (Jim Dvorak, Paul Rutherford, Gary Curzon et al), and on 16: Equip Out (Elton Dean, Paul Rogers et al) and Radio Daze (Ian Smith, Brian Godding, Steve Noble). Start time is 7 pm on both nights, tickets £5/£3, Box Office 071 226 1916.

International May Festivals:

SONAR at the CCCB (Contemporary Culture Centre) in Barcelona (26-29 May), an exploration of electronics in music and multimedia, with gigs from The Orb, Trans-Global Underground, DJs Laurent Garner and the Wotan of Norse Techno, Sven Vath, exhibitions and installations of 'classic' synthesizers, CD-ROM and electroacoustic research (details 010 93 425 43 78). **The 17th Victoriaville International Festival**, Canada: Jim O'Rourke, Charles Gayle, Keith Tippett, Diamanda Galas, Caspar Brötzmann Massaker and many more. (19-23 May, details/accommodation 819 752 7912). **Musique Action 94** in Vandoeuvre, France: European improv including Derek Bailey, Barre Phillips, Quatuor Helios, Jim O'Rourke (again), Conrad Bauer, Evan Parker, The Ex & Tom Cora, Hans Reichel, Joëlle Leandre, Eugene Chadbourne. 9-15 May, details 010 B3 57 52 54.

Closer to home, there's a healthy

jazz programme at the Bath International Music Festival. At the Guildhall you can hear Marilyn Crispell, Eddie Prevost & Evan Parker (28 May) and Louis Scavies (1 June), while The Pavilion hosts The Dirty Dozen Brass Band (29 May), Boys Of The Lough (30), David Murray (8 June), John Surman with his quartet and Brass Project (10). There's more... full details on 0225 463362.



John Surman

Still in the West Country. Chard Festival Of Women In Music involves African vocalist Bisi Maibongi with her band Iwasa, Shiva Nova with Orphy Robinson, performing Piri Piri's new composition Polyphony (they also appear on 1 May at Birmingham Midlands Arts Centre and 13 May at the Purcell Room on London's South Bank), Kate Westbrook & The Skirmishers, Aruna Narayan Kalle, the world's only woman sarangi soloist, folk foursome The Poozies, Stevie Wishart's early music ensemble Sinfonie, Dairde Cartwright (guitarist out of *Rootschool* — she'll never live that down), and Sheila Chandra 25-30 May. Programmes, booking info, accommodation from 0460 67463

The Leeds International Music Festival, a new, prestigious affair that's developed from previous Leeds College Of Music ventures, has secured Diane Schuur, Stan

Tracey's Octet, The Balanescu Quartet & John Surman, Courtney Pine, Dave Holland, The Sabri Brothers, Wayne Marshall, Chick Corea's Elektric Band, as well as various classical recitals, a music technology open day, and a demonstration of contemporary trombone practice. 8-15 May. Box Office 0532 476932, Festival Office 0532 432491

Findings is a short string of London recitals of new or influential experimental composition. Pianist Sarah Walker plays John White, Cornelius Cardew, Sabe and Martin Pyne (11 May, Conway Hall), percussionist Simon Allen plays Morton Feldman, Jon Hendckse, Pyne and others (15, Turtle Key Arts Centre, Fulham), and The Redlands Consort play John Cage, Michael Parsons, Francesca Hanley and more (24, Conway Hall). Details on 0784 438521

Paul Ruders's *Second Cello* Concerto receives its first international performance with Heinrich Schiff in the soloist's chair, accompanied by The Northern Sinfonia. The programme, which also includes Lutoslawski, Dutilleul and Mahler, is on tour in May, at Coventry UWAC (9), Lancaster University (10), Norwich St Andrews Hall (11), Brighton Dome (12), Plymouth Pavilions (13), Sheffield City Hall (14) and Newcastle Playhouse (15). Check local press for full details

The life of soul singer Jackie Wilson, who died ten years ago, is

an editor's idea



Looking through this issue of *The Wire*, you will find opera wunderkind Mark Anthony Turnage talking enthusiastically about a future collaboration with jazz head and Hollywood composer Mike Gibbs, Thurston Moore finding links between the US/UK alternative rock undergrounds and such 60s free jazz refugees as Charles Gayle and Arthur Doyle, Simon Reynolds writing about the post-Velvets guitar trio Main sharing a London stage with an improvising trio featuring AMM's Eddie Prevost; an A-Z Of Dub that refers to collaborations between Augustus Pablo and The Boo Radleys, details of Canadian guitar experimentalist Tim Brady performing pieces by the Spanish composer José-Manuel Montaña, and so on and so on.

If there's an underlying theme to this (or any recent) issue of *The Wire*, it's the idea that, currently, the most exciting developments in music are taking place at such outwardly unlikely moments of convergence. Rising out of the detail and circumstance of these events, there is a sense of gathering momentum, a coming together of the more adventurous spirits from rock, jazz, improvised and composed musics in an atmosphere of mutual expansion and exchange that, potentially, will carry us forward into a new world of musical possibilities and connections. It's the kind of world, for instance, envisaged by the Blast First label (who are currently celebrating, with *The Wire*'s help, 10 years of championing music's marginalised and aligned fringes), when they announce plans, also in this issue, to bring free jazz marauder Peter Brotzmann and Ambient duo Insides together on the same stage as part of their new *Disobey* club.

Disobey is this what these conjunctions are suggesting? That we should ignore the barriers that have been erected between musicians down the years? And instead start to draw new lines of communication, unmediated by questions of marketing, audience expectation, media demarcation, or even the musicians' own personal histories and geography? If so, it's a call that *The Wire* is only too happy to go on heeding.

Meanwhile, regular readers of the magazine will notice that we have introduced two new sections with this issue. On pages 12 and 13 you will find *Bites*, four, er, bite sized features on Yamatsuka Eye, Sun Ra, Sheila Chandra, and David Toop and Max Eastley. Month by month this section will let us cover music and musicians that, for one reason or another, we think you will want to read about, but otherwise wouldn't have got into the magazine due to lack of space. These are not intended to be definitive profiles of specific musicians and their careers, but we hope they will prompt you to find out more about them and their work.

The second new section, *Naked Eye*, will provide a forum for *The Wire*'s unparalleled list of critics and contributors to, well, mouth off, basically. It's our opinion column, if you like. This month, Richard Scott writes about the new video release of Ron Fricke's film *Baraka* (and what it tells us about our attitude towards non-Western cultures) with the kind of passion and disregard for industry niceties that once defined the UK's music press but which these days seems to have deserted all but a few refusenik outposts. Which is where we come in. **TONY HERRINGTON**



Dirty Dozen

retold in a new musical, *Pierrot* — *The Jackie Wilson Story*, touring the UK in May and June. Julia Davis's script places Wilson's life in the context of the American Civil Rights Movement, and examines his creative friendship and philosophical differences with Sam Cooke in the early 60s. It's at Manchester NIA Centre (4-7 May, 061 227 9254), Leicester Haymarket (17-21, 0533 539797), Liverpool Playhouse (24-4 June, 051 709 8363), and Newcastle Playhouse (7-11, 091 230 5151).

Response, a weekend of sharp-contemporary composition performed by the London Sinfonietta at London's Barbican Centre (21-22 May), aims to (as the name suggests) promote the accessibility of much New Music, by creating an informal environment in which to experience it: free foyer



Laurie Anderson
plant

PHOTO: ANDREW BETHUNE/CORBIS

music, a paranoia demonstration, and film screenings, as well as the concerts proper. The two programmes contain 'jazz-influenced' works such as Mark Anthony Turnage's *Koi* (21, see feature page 18), and Franco Donatoni's *Hot* (22, sax soloist John Harle), and are linked by the mechanised fantasies of American-Mexican composer Conlon Nanarrow. Tickets are £9/£5, and you'll get full details from the Barbican Box Office on 071 638 8123.

Pirna Maradona Opera North's production of Benedict Pisoni's new opera *Playing Away* allows them to try on costumes hitherto unseen in the opera house: soccer strip. Howard Brenton's story of Terry, a footballer who makes a pact with The Great Referee — the Devil, natch — in return for sporting fame, receives its British premiere at Leeds Grand Theatre on 31 May. Box Office 0532 439999. Meanwhile, in London, the world premiere season of Judith Weir's new opera *Blond Eckbert* continues into May at London's Coliseum (071 836 3161), on 4, 12, 14 and 18 at 7.30 pm.

O Superwoman Laurie Anderson, the American multimedia performance artist and musician, will visit the UK this month to read from a new book, *Stories From The*



London: a who's who and what's what of sonic disruption, dissonance and disobedience. Among many performers over the four days are Marilyn Crispell in duo with drummer Eddie Prevost, vocalist Shelley Hirsch, computer violinist Jon Rose, lo-fi plunderphonics Stock, Hausen & Walkman, hi-fi abuser Otomo Yoshihide with the inevitable Yamatsuka Eye, John Stevens's Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth accompanying a rant by Niki Elliot of Huggy Bear, Fred Frith, Canadian electroacoustician Paul Doldier, Steve Beresford's 'Solo With Interruptions' in different interpretations each night, and (in their 29th year) AMM... that's what we call Now Music. Tickets are £9 (£6 concs) or £32 (£20) for a season ticket.

COMPETITION We have TWO PAIRS of season tickets to give away. Just tell us which of the following has played in every line-up of AMM since its formation: A — Keith Rowe, B — Eddie Prevost, C — Cornelius Cardew. Answers before 10 May on a postcard to our usual address (mark your entry 'LMC Competition'), or fax us on 071 287 4767.

Nerve Bible, a retrospective survey of her 20 year career. The evening at Sadler's Wells Theatre (23, 8 pm) will include music and 'visual aids', but that's all they're saying. Anderson, who hasn't performed here since 1990, is currently completing a new album for Warners, scheduled to appear later this year. Tickets for the event are £5-£16, from 071 278 8916.

Another influential but rarely seen artist, John Cale, plays two rare shows this month: at London's Forum (071 284 2200) on 29 May, and Edinburgh Queens Hall (30).

'The Sabri Brothers, Pakistan' apparently, the celebrated qawwali

group live so simply and command so much respect that letters addressed in this way will reach them with ease. This month though, they're harder to pin down as they race around the UK: Glasgow Couper Institute (11), Watford Palace Theatre (8), Leeds Civic Centre (14), Reading Hexagon (16), Liverpool Unity Theatre (19), Birmingham Town Hall (20), and Nottingham Theatre Royal (22).

Saif Kaita, the acclaimed Malian singer, is in the country too: Oxford Playhouse (8, 0865 798600), Manchester Al's Music Cafe (9, 061 236 9971), Sherfield Mandala Hall (10, 0742 738934).



Tony Bevan

and London Forum (11, 071 284 2200)

Jazz Rumours at The Vortex (North London, Sundays) sticks its waggly ear into the London Jazz Festival, with Equip Out, (an Elton Dean/Paul Rogers quartet) on 15 May and Phil Minton/Vervan Weston/John Butcher/Roger Turner on 22 coming under the LJF banner (both cost £5/£4). Otherwise, the club returns to what it considers normal for Tony Bevan/Steve Noble/Phil Minton (11), Alan Skidmore Trio (8), and Bardo Sane Orchestra with Jim Dvorak (29), with admission back to a stately £4/£3.

Slam Records supreme George Haslam tells us that in some towns he passed through during his recent jaunt round Patagonia, the inhabitants had never seen a bantone sax before. (Well where

have those people been living — South America?) George, whose latest 'tmo jazz' CD *Argentine Adventures* is reviewed in this month's Soundcheck, is touring the UK with Buenos Aires this month (that's the name of a quintet he works with on these Argentinean jaunts). Confirmed dates are Oxford Peers Arts Centre (7), Manchester Band On The Wall (9), Glasgow Rentfrew Ferry (11), Blackpool New Ryton Hotel (12-13), Bracknell South Hill Park (14), Abingdon 25 Bridge Street (15), Oxford Playhouse Festival (21), Sutton Courtney Matrix (24), Reading Rising Sun (26), Aldershot West End Centre (28).

The Tony Bevan Trio, with Phil Minton (vocal/trumpet) and Steve Noble (drums), are touring under the auspices of Jazz Services this month, and appear at Southampton Turner Simms Hall

the office ambience

- The Last Prophet** — Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (Real World)
- Nouveau Western** — MC Solaar (Talkin' Loud)
- Buried Dreams** — David Toop & Max Eastley (Beyond)
- A Brief History Of Ambient Volume Three** — Various (Virgin)
- Young, Gifted And Black** — Aretha Franklin (Rhino)
- The Pacific Jazz Years** — Chet Baker (Pacific Jazz)
- Maddening Shroud EP** — Acacia (Alchemy Arts)
- Time Of Change** — Bai (SLT)
- Scientist Wins The World Cup** — Scientist (Greensleeves)
- Experimental Jet Set** — Sonic Youth (Geffen)

Compiled by The Wire sound system

Mr Bell Considers



Friday evening starts badly. I find myself locked inside a deserted office building. Due to a misunderstanding, I could be trapped in here until Monday morning. A few bloody fingernails later, I finally discover how to operate the automatic loading bay door, and with one bound I am free! Now it's off to Brixton to hear The Cocteau Twins.

The streets outside Brixton tube are dotted with touts offering to buy my ticket, giving the flattering impression that this entire area of London is solely dedicated to this concert. I am tempted to sell my ticket at a big profit and nip home for an evening curled up on the sofa with Antonia Byatt.

The next thing I realise is that I will never find my friends. I have made the vaguest arrangements to meet them inside, but the hall is already a throbbing jelly composed of thousands of people. I shuffle slowly through to the front. The dilemma is that near the stage you can examine the musicians' state of mind and what they are wearing, but further back the sound might be better. I settle for a spot four yards in front of the monstrous black tower block which is this evening's PA system.

Suddenly we are all plunged into darkness, save for the winking effects units on stage. The seven musicians ambie onstage in twilight like drowsy gods, and — this always happens — someone with big hair pushes through and stands right in front of me. We all hold our breath, knowing that this is the finest moment of the evening, when the drumsticks click four times and the music hits the hall like some foaming tidal jaccuzzi. There's the familiar bass pounding in the chest, but here's something new — my trouser legs are shaking around my calves, driven by pure sub-woofer bottom ecstasy.

If you've never seen The Cocteau Twins, you should know they are loud. Not an angry, ear bleeding loud, but a wrap around, heavenly-vombloud. We are here to be drenched in guitar waterfalls, cascades of chorus and torrents of tremolo. OK, I'm standing far too close to the PA, but we're swaying into electric guitar heaven anyway — no one's really dancing, the correct dance would be something underwater involving tropical fish.

The other reason we're here is Liz, the singer. We've heard the tales of her painful stage fright, her introversion and suffering that makes it hard for her to perform at all. Frankly, we're worried about her. But tonight she looks great — very sensitive, but she's laughing, and she runs to hug the skinny blonde guitarist after the third song. And her singing is the surprise of the evening. In place of the oh-so-delicate voice in the recordings, embedded in filigrees of delay and echo, she lets rip a series of strange vocal experiments, trying out choppy tremolos and bird-like shrieks. "Warbles away, doesn't she," remarks a punter. "She's a right old warbler."

After seven or eight encores we're ready to leave, glowing with the unique pleasure provided by 90 minutes of extremely loud music. In the foyer I see a big placard offering the perfect way to wrap up the evening: 'Extra Large Ribena, 80p' **CLIVE BELL**

sounding



The Creative Jazz Orchestra, with the composer directing from the saxophone, at the LJF (see above) and Liverpool Bluecoat Arts Centre (18.05.17 08.05.00, £6.50/£4.50) And The Paul Mosan Trio, with Bill Fretwell and Joe Lovano, play their only UK date at Belfast Crescent Arts Centre (16.02.22 24.23.38, £8)

Live bites London's Jazz Cafe

(4.07.03 6.17.17), Luton 33 Arts Centre (5.05.82 4.19.584), Oatlington Great Hall (6.08.03 8.63.073), and Bracknell Recital Room (03.44.484.123) Vocalist Jan Ponsford, who appears on Harry Beckett's recent *All Four One CD*, takes her six piece band to Southampton University (3.07.03 7.74.24), Canterbury Penny Theatre (4.02.27 4.70.512), Bristol Albert Inn (8.02.72 6.61.968), Hastings Street (10.02.27 7.85.257), London Vortex (11.07.254 6.51.6), and the Royal Festival Hall (13.07.92 06.00)

Three jazz heavyweights (statue, not build) in the UK in May: pianist McCoy Tyner and his Big Band — the ex-Coltrane collaborator plays Edinburgh Queen's Hall (20.03.16 8.20.19), Birmingham Town Hall (21.02.21 2.36.2392), Manchester RNCM (22.06.21 2.73.4504) and London Royal Festival Hall (23.07.92 8.8800) Anthony Braxton — seven new works commissioned and performed by

(07.91.6.6000) highlights include Alfredo Rodriguez (4), Ipanema girl Astrud Gilberto (9-14), Groove Collective (20), juju man Or John (23-25), and The Orty Oozen Brass Band (26-28) International Jazz Day (28 May) will be celebrated all day at the Bull's Head in Barnes, South London, with appearances from Roy 'Bubbles' Burrows, the ex-Sun Ra and Duke Ellington trumpeter, Angele Veltmeijer and Julie Doyle. Nana Mouskour (surely some mistake — Ed) appears at Reading Hexagon (1.07.34 5.91.591), Birmingham Symphony Hall (2.02.21 2.33.33) and London Albert Hall (3.07.15 8.9.212) Louise Elliott, she of the sax and flute, plays Battersea Arts Centre (15.07.22 2.22.23), Tulse Hill Tavern (17.08.16 7.4.9.754) and the Cafe Club in South London (21.3.78 19.88) Southampton Jazz Society at the University (07.03

59.3600) hosts a Young Jazz Pianist competition (10), then Peter King (17) and Brilliant Corners (24) Andrea Vicari plays at Swindon Jazz Front (20.07.93 6.11.181) Abdul Tee-Jay's Rokoto, from Sierra Leone, play at Leicester's Phoenix Arts Centre (6.05.33 5.5.4854), the latest instalment of the venue's monthly Africa Beat bash

Confessions Of An Afro Soul is a one-man music theatre piece written and performed by composer/writer Juvon Ogungbe. It's a confessional piece centred around the character of Ooro, a British-born African who finds himself in isolation as a result of his struggle to keep both aspects of his African and European cultures in harmony. The show is touring to Chart's Palace in East London (6.08.19 8.5.68.78), Barner Old Bull (22.08.14 4.49.51.89) and Reading Riley Snooker Club (26.07.34 5.73.705), with more dates to be confirmed

television & radio

Later With Jools Holland (Saturdays from 7.10.20 pm), one of very few network TV programmes actually to feature musicians playing live in the studio (although with more restrained presentation than Holland's last music show *The Tube* — the artists are arranged in a circle and are forced to applaud each other after each 'burn'), returns for a new series, with Elvis Costello, US rockers Counting Crows, Otis Rush (7), the reformed Traffic, Nick Cave, Cassandra Wilson (14), The Pretenders, Erasure, Angelique Kidjo, Tony Toni Toné and Modern Jive Jonathon Richman (21), with the zu zu man himself, Or John, slated for a future appearance

Music In Our Time on Radio Three (Sundays, 10.15 pm) broadcasts extracts from a marathon Mexican recital given last November by composer/pianist Michael Finnis, as well as Nancarrow and Scelsi works played by the formidable Arditti Quartet (8), and a studio session by the group Jane's Minstrels (15), performing new works by Keith Gifford (*The Song Streams In The Firmament*) and Todd Bink (*Moonmadness*, 10.15)

A big shout goin' out to WNUR 89.3 in Illinois, whose Jazz Show playlist — from Last Exit through Coltrane, Don Byron, Ed Blackwell to Henry Threadgill — exhibits immaculate taste. Who is Zusaan Kail Fasteau and why do they play his/her 'Prophecy' every show? No idea — the Sounding Off tranny has trouble picking up GLR. Send innovative music for them to play to David Sack, 1905 Sheridan Rd, Evanston, IL 60208-2260, USA (Tel: 708.491.7102)

Did you know... jazz lovers receive eight and a half pence each from public funding, compared to £7.95 each for opera goers, even though the national audience for both kinds of music is the same size. Someone from the Arts Council sat down and worked it out. The Association of British Jazz Musicians is campaigning for a 'proper slice of the arts funding cake', and if you'd like a stir yourself, contact Chris Hodgkins at 5 Oryden Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9NW, or phone 071.829.835



letter from norway

**On a stage outside the supermarket
a Hammond organist plays "Oh What
A Beautiful Morning". Only in a foreign
country could this be enjoyable.**

"You are hotly welcome to Voss!" says Lars Mosselinn, not for the first or last time during my stay. Norway is scattered with a heavy dusting of music festivals, and Mosselinn is the organiser of Vossa Jazz, the second largest (held in March) 14,000 attended this year.

Voss is a small town situated an hour's drive east of Bergen. It has taken shape next to a lake in a wide, snow covered valley. The streets are rammed on the Saturday morning: skiers, lottery vendors, film crews, lifesize carved trolls, girls handing out free roses. On a hastily erected stage outside the supermarket, Jerry Dahlstrom is playing "Oh What A Beautiful Morning" on a rumble Hammond organ, only in a foreign country could this be enjoyable. At lunch, singer Mari Boine appears at my table with her band. She's psyching herself up for tonight's performance — the festival's main event. "I feel like I have given birth to ten babies in three weeks," she says, pecking at a bowl of bernies, referring to the specially commissioned work, *Leikostit*, she's going to unveil that evening. When it comes, it's a dark, wrenching triumph. Moaning, wheezing, almost weeping, holding 2000 Norwegians rapt and silent while singing in a language they do not understand (that of the exiled Sami tribe), the full extent of her radicalism hits home. Earlier that week she had snubbed a music award from a Norwegian Christian organisation, but nevertheless she's huge here; singing of liberation in a land which, though comfortable, is still a tightly run patriarchy with dark secrets in its history.

'Jazz' in Norway is really just a catch-all phrase for new, creative, intuitive music making, and in Voss visiting artists such as Abbey Lincoln, Andy Sheppard and Hermeto Pascoal seem out of place, the canned air of the Trocadero instead of the rarified stuff that lingers up here. That night, Auramero conjure a music that attests to the beauty and mystery of all the pinpoints of light standing out in a tumbling constellation on the surrounding hillsides. This young quartet are joined by trumpeter Kenny Wheeler (they sent him a tape which he loved), and together they stoke a fire in an ice palace: a wonderfully direct, confident set full of toothpaste-fresh modal drift from the bell of Wheeler's flugelhorn. Pianist Christian Wallumrod radiates McCoy Tynerish concentration, and at the end they rock out, drummer Per Oddvar Johansen slicing into the "Funky Drummer" motif with a diamond cutter's multifaceted vision.

Wallumrod turns up next day in Nutrio, joining trumpeter Arve Henriksen to colour in Eldbjorg Raknes's vocal fits and glides. They

evoke stillness and enhanced receptivity. "When language moves from source to receiver, the receiver becomes the source and the dance of eternity begins," Raknes whispers, and snow cascades from the roof. A magical moment.

On Sunday Voss falls silent: everyone either goes to church or takes the 2600 foot cable car ride to ski at the top of the mountain. I arrive at the summit in time to watch The Band's Rick Danko collapse on a pair of skis before being taken on a hair raising snowbuggy ride up an almost vertical slope. Up here there's time to reflect also. Scandinavian music may seem impossibly abstract, but it's already blessed with the altitude, the glide, the zen calm that John Coltrane had to strive towards with such violence (and the country has always welcomed dissident, disillusioned US players, like Don Cherry and John Tchicai, with open ears).

Norway is on the whole secure, leisure intensive, subsidised (festivals receive 30-50 per cent state funding), but most musicians here use the opportunities the country offers as an adventure playground, not a retirement lounge. And there's still room for agitation: witness that night's extraordinary set by the trio Jokileba, led by trumpeter/provocateur Per Jorgenson. His playing is a tremendous release, as hot as Norwegian music gets; the kind of whitehot, screaming stabs and astral runs Miles was producing in the early 80s. In between solos, and buoyed up by the hyperactive, funky percussion of drummer Audun Kleive, Jorgenson sings — a mysterious lone hubbub on and off mic, perhaps traces of the calls of ancient foresters up on the mountainside. There's a hilarious impishness to the group as well: comedians Gunnar and Bjarne appear halfway through dressed as noise abatement officers, shaking their heads and sloping off again, cropping up later as toiletgoers startled by the audience, behind samples of the hotel john recorded before the set.

At the end of festival party, shouting above a performance of sanctified intensity by The Five Blind Boys Of Alabama, Jorgenson tells me he chases sounds as if he were hunting wild animals — if the music dashes off in one direction, he's compelled to follow wherever it may lead him. "Feels pretty good up here," say The Five Blind Boys between every number. My thoughts exactly. **ROB YOUNG** (Thanks to Lars, Per and Jorud)



Mari Boine

PHOTO: ARNE KJØRSET





SMIRNOFF

THE OTHER SIDE.



What's a Zen kiss? "Sometimes when I'm singing there's no sensation in my throat. It feels as if some outside influence has taken over. The air is coming through me — as if I'm being sung, like a flute. The Zen kiss encapsulates the feeling, because it's something that comes out of nothing, touching my lips and breathing through me."

Sheila Chandra's *The Zen Kiss* (Real World) might just be the most extraordinary record of solo vocal music since, well, her previous record of solo vocal music, 1991's *Weaving My Ancestor's Voices*. Chandra's background includes stage school, Indo Pop crossover with Monsoon's 1982 "Ever So Lonely" track, and experiments with the transcendental qualities of Asian ragas and drones on the albums *Quiet* and *Nodo Brahma*. The impulses that lie behind her current music came like a flash of light.

"[In the mid-80s] I started to become aware that the ornaments that British folk singers used were the same as those in the North Indian vocal tradition. Then I realized I'd also heard this in Islamic vocals, Andalusian vocals, and the music of Bulgaria. Suddenly it became crystal clear."

The Zen Kiss works as an intricate tapestry of vocal traditions freed from specific temporal and geographic locations. Traditional English folk melodies are reworked with blues and gospel inflections, an ancient Irish lynch is sung with Islamic intonation. "Speaking in Tongues" mixes up Southern Indian vocal forms with elocution exercises, Celtic balladry, and phrases drawn from bird song, advertising and the playground. Sheila gives a little unexpected credit to recent developments in music technology when she refers to the track as a "post-sampling thing. I couldn't have written it without having heard what a sampler can do." **PUNITA AGA**



Buried Dreams is a CD package of music, short stories and artwork put together by journalist **David Toop** and artist **Max Eastley**. If you've been waiting around for a record that would rescue the notion of Ambient music from the dead hand clutches of Prog rock refugees and cryogenically frozen Techno-hippies, then *Buried Dreams* might be your moment.

Is Ambient a correct description for music this strange, this compelling? "Ambient through a glass darkly," is how Toop describes it, which is one way to get a handle on the teeming detail and dread atmospheres that are magicked into being by the CD's abstract, sensurround collage of alien samples, pulseless electronics and scrape 'n' scratch improvisations.

Buried Dreams is the follow up (twenty years on) to the duo's *New And Rediscovered Musical Instruments* (one of the first 'environmental' records, released in 1975 on Brian Eno's Obscure label and due to be reissued later this year by Virgin).

Toop's stories (apocalyptic tales that draw on ideas of ancient ritual, imagined futures, the occult) and Eastley's artwork (shadowy depictions of insect mutations, strange hieroglyphs and crystal formations) map the flow of the music. The title of the CD is taken from a biography of a US serial killer. After listening to it, at least one acquaintance claims to have had recurring nightmares, wandering in a wasteland of dark, black mud and severed cow's heads. *Buried dreams* is right. **TONY HERRINGTON**



Despite testimony that **Sun Ra** moved to reside on higher planes in May 1993, his shadow seems reluctant to leave the planet that was his 20th century base. In the wake of spirit raising ceremonies (read reissue programmes) held by the Blast First and Evidence labels, comes news (from the unlikely Ra outpost of Herrsching, Germany) of what might be the ultimate Sun Ra document.

According to publisher Sigrid Geerken, Omniverse Sun Ra is "a documentation of the life-work of Sun Ra—the result of about 30 years' research." Edited by writer Hartmut Geerken and 'computer specialist and jazz rock discographer' Bernhard Hebele, Omniverse is an LP sized book that looks like one of the most comprehensive surveys of a musician's working life yet. It includes articles on Ra by Amin Baraka and Chris Cutler, among others, a photomontage account of Sun Ra's 1971 trip to Egypt, as well as a discography, 'tapeography' (listing 220 private recordings), bibliography (over 600 entries) and 'limnography' that together detail the minutiae of Ra's life and music.

I'm as wary of the collector's mentality as anyone, but even so, this is remarkable stuff. The discography, for instance, lists around 200 albums, complete with full colour prints of the sleeves and labels. Each album comes with footnotes, and some of these are priceless. The entry for the *Atlantis* album, for instance, which was originally released on Ra's Saturn label in 1969 and reissued by Impulse! in 1973, includes the legends: "Mu" lasts 4:30 on Saturn but 4:49 on Impulse due to perversion of cutting at the second entry of [John] Gilmore, and 'The Impulse' version of "Yucatan" ends with a telephone ring. As the book's blurb puts it: "The Saturn chaos finally under control! All references possible!" **NATHAN WEST** (Details of how to obtain copies of Omniverse Sun Ra are available from S Geerken, Wartowei 37, D-82211 Herrsching, Germany.)

Last night, he was all decked out like some HipHopper from hell, a ski mask pulled over his face, a microphone half buried in his mouth, screaming all sorts of madness out into the small, cramped North London club. Today, the only thing that's screaming is his T-shirt, a resplendent little green number with the words "I Hate Music" emblazoned on the front in big yellow type.

"It should be 'I love music'," says **Yamatsuka Eye**, the surprisingly soft spoken (when he speaks at all, that is) illustrious frontman with Japan's rock-cum-dada demons The Boredoms. "Meaning what?" I ask. But no verbal explanation is forthcoming, instead he feverishly tucks into an imaginary bowl of rice like someone who's just seen his first meal in weeks.

The analogy sticks. On *Aids-A-Delic* (Public Bath), a recent CD by Eye's nose troupe, Hanatarash, he spews it all back up along with the vegetable tenyaki and miso soup. Guttural retching and eskimo-style squeals (eskimos are his heroes) intercut with brazen audio plundering and failing percussion: it's like *musique concrète* gone completely screwball.

Eye is something of a hero on Japan's explosive hardcore scene. Hanatarash, for instance, got its underground stripes from the group's now legendary live performances, where, in true Cagney fashion, any sound was fair game. For one memorable show, Eye swapped his vocal mic for an industrial digger and spent the set in the driver's seat, smashing up old cars (and, by accident, part of the venue as well).

A career in 'live art' doesn't beckon, it's as *Supervox Humana* that Eye gets on the payroll. Thanks to a continuing, fruitful association with John Zorn, both as an improv partner and, until last year, collaborations in Naked City, Eye has found himself sharing the stage with Sonic Youth, and being spliced into Bill Laswell's Praxis project. Back home a whole host of activities beckon. There's the unashamedly psychedelic Nankai Hawkwind, the avant punk racket of The Boredoms and UFO Or Die, his new thrash band Concrete Octopus (his current rave), rap crossovers with HipHoppers Audio Sports, duos with turntable manipulator Otomo Yoshihide. **DAVID ILLIC** (*Yamatsuka Eye appears at this month's LMC festival. See Sounding Off for details.*)





bad young brother

What's Branford Marsalis up to now?

Branford Marsalis sits in his dressing room in the bowels of the NBC TV studios, Burbank, California, surrounded by music technology and baseball memorabilia, nursing aching limbs from playing American football the day before and bemoaning the differences between himself and "the people upstairs", the programme decision makers, after 18 months as musical director of *The Tonight Show*.

When he took over the show's band leader's seat from Doc Severinson the jazz world shook its head in shame. His career as a leading bastion of neo-bop jazz seemed to be back on track after those years with Sting and now he was compromising his art once again, this time for prime time TV. Except that wasn't the circumstance in which Branford took the job. "I was told we were going to break new ground," he says. "Force ideas down people's throats. The great jazz attitude is 'we do what we do'. A lot of shows have that attitude. It doesn't have to be 'fuck you', it's 'hey, we do what we do, if you don't like it, change channels.' And that attracted me," he says, nonchalantly turning his baseball cap backwards and slipping it back on his head.

Marsalis has always had a "like it or take a walk" attitude to his audience, and to further confound the critics who said he was wasting his talents, he's now releasing a pop record (on Columbia), *Buckshot Le Fonque* (his pseudonym for non-jazz projects, and a name which was originally used by saxophonist Cannonball Adderley on a Louis Smith record). After nine jazz albums and a blues record why is he turning to pop? "I've been working on this in my head for the last three years and it's the perfect time to just get it down on tape, get it out of my head and move onto the next project," he says shrugging. "I did it because I felt like doing it. It wasn't like I suddenly had the urge to make a record of Hungarian folk tunes. If I did, I'd have to spend two or three years listening to them if I tried it."

He's no stranger to pop music — besides playing with Sting, he's accompanied Bruce Hornsby, The Grateful Dead, Albert Collins, rappers Gang Starr and metal funksters Fishbone. *Buckshot* is an infectious and

anarchic mix of everything from jazz with dancehall rhythms, Heavy Metal riffs with blues improvisations to country twang over HipHop beats, and features among others Nils Lofgren, Albert Collins (in one of the last recorded performances before he died), DJ Premier from Gang Starr and trumpeter Roy Hargrove. He claims he's not cashing in on the current tendency towards jazz rap fusions, however. "Everybody's calling their record HipHop jazz," he complains. "There are jazz things and a jazz sensibility but it's not a jazz record by any stretch of the imagination. I would never allow it to be called as such."

It's been suggested that Marsalis aims to be difficult for difficult's sake but he's merely trying to extend his musical boundaries, he says. He mentions that his record company weren't too happy about the prospect of marketing him as a pop musician and he's equally a thorn in people's sides at the *Tonight Show*. "I'm fairly difficult, you can ask around. Because I want to push the show over the edge," he says, raising his eyebrows. "That's just my opinion and that's what I feel and I'm a pain in everybody's ass around here."

Despite the fact that he says his brother, trumpeter Wynton, is long past caring what Branford says or does, his next project is playing clarinet in the pit orchestra for Wynton's new opera. Branford admits a passion for opera and rap music, but what does he really listen to? What's in his car CD collection? "The first is a Billie Holiday compilation, then Woo Tan Chan, third *La Traviata* by Verdi, the fourth is *Mr Aeroplane Man by Howlin' Wolf*, *Zooropa*, then Nirvana. I like to ride from here to the Grand Canyon and just play CDs, not talk."

With such eclectic taste does he think he'll ever return to playing jazz full time? "I'll do anything I feel like doing," he says quickly. "I can't understand people who say they've got nothing to do, there's so many things I want to do. I want to write an opera, I want to write a couple of soundtracks, I'm going to conducting school, I want to finish my history degree because I want to make documentaries. There's so many things to do. I live with my choices." **LAURA CONNELLY**



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string scenario

What's Tim Brady doing to the guitar?



"I guess you could say that my two instruments are the electric guitar and the 24 track recording studio." Canadian Tim Brady belongs to a generation for whom The Beatles (in a hoary old punning) were more important than Bach, or even Berg. In artistic terms at least, his putative father is George Martin, for whom a guitar could sound like anything from a weeping girl to the rattle of thunder. Somewhere in the back of Brady's mind has been the sound of a hypothetical axe — "What if they made guitars with thousands of strings and frets and millions of notes?" — that would bust the restrictive disciplines of mere (as it's currently labelled) virtuosity wide open.

That was very much the scenario of his 1991 *Imaginary Guitars* album, on which Brady multitracked live guitar over 22 pre-recorded parts, producing the kind of grand symphonic sound Glenn Branca only dreams of. However, Brady's other records, from *Visions*, almost ten years ago, to the new *Scenarios* (Justin Time), haven't by any means all been studio confections, and it's pleasingly difficult to judge on which shelf in your collection Brady most comfortably sits. In 1991, he recorded a set of *Double Variations* with jazz guitar impressionist John Abercrombie. However, Abercrombie brought along his guitar synth and turned the whole thing, quite unexpectedly, into a wide-screen fantasy.

Brady also runs his own ensemble, Bradyworks, which on the strength of 1991's *Inventions* was the Montreal based Justin Time label's pitch for the ECM market. They even brought in John Surman and Stu Martin for the date.

It all goes back to *Visions*, the only one of his major pieces so far on which Brady doesn't himself play, though he added three guitar pieces (one of them an improvised duet with trumpeter Kenny Wheeler). Given that most of his music relies on rigorously structured studio and tape compositions, does he enjoy improvising? "Sure I do. It's the basic discipline, in some ways it's the way you get your ideas, and I still like to do it just for its own sake, on its own terms, not just for compositional ideas. It was great working with Kenny. I just figured I write great symphonies, he plays great improvised solos, let's not get in each other's way."

It takes a certain level of self-possession for a jazz and rock based guitarist, still a couple of years shy of 40, to describe himself as a writer of great symphonies, but Brady does it with the same easy certainty

that you hear in his playing. Neatly bearded, wearing modestly trendy eye glasses, he looks every inch the serious young seminarian. It has been the dilemma of ambitious inishmen for generations — Joyce, say, or Beckett — that the country offers no language large enough for the artistic visions that lie dormant in its restless culture. Unlike them, perhaps more like Bono, Brady has grown up in a culture of proliferating possibilities, with the technical means to realise them cheaply, and more ambitiously, at his disposal.

Scenarios offers further confirmation of Brady's commitment to a style of playing that balances technical sophistication with traditional interpretative values. Significantly, it includes three Spanish-tinged pieces by the brilliant young Zaragozan José-Manuel Montañés, alongside a more radical, noise-based composition by the Argentinian Michael Rosas Coban, a piece that was performed on Brady's trip to London in 1992. Brady's own contributions include "LOUD Solo", a curiously Zappa-like cadenza lifted from an orchestral commission for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and "Mercury Fountain", written for a bizarrely retuned electric guitar. He finds room, as on *Imaginary Guitars*, for work by fellow Canadians Marc Tremblay's "Guitare Graffiti", in particular, is a bold exploration of the guitar in all its moods.

"Of course, it's no coincidence that it should be a Canadian that sees the electric guitar as the composer's instrument of the late 20th century, or maybe the early 21st century," says Brady. "People talk about Asia, but I think Canada's where it's all going to be happening in the next century. Maybe not just yet, we're still to some extent a second hand culture, but we're absorbing so much of the best of what's going on, and so much from Asia itself, ironically, that it's going to start happening soon." **BRIAN MORTON**

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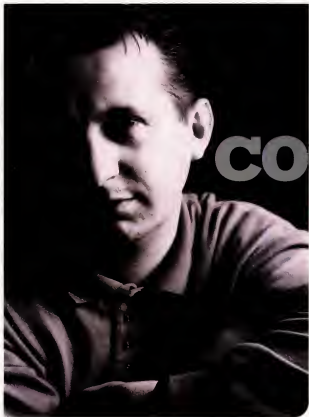
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coarse opera

Mark Anthony Turnage's *Greek*
is the first opera to carry a 'Parental Advisory' sticker.
He tells Nick Kimberley about
the force of effing and blinding.

Spring 1994 is a significant moment for new British opera. A recording of Mark Anthony Turnage's *Greek* (conducted by Richard Bernard) has just been released by Argo, and at the end of May, Benedict Mason's opera *Playing Away* has its UK premiere in Leeds. Meanwhile, in London, Judith Weir's *Blond Eckbert* receives its English National Opera world premiere at the end of April, which will shortly be followed by its US debut.

Could this be some kind of turning point? Might it be that the words 'British' and 'opera' have finally found a way to come together? Well, yes — and no.

Both *Greek* and *Playing Away* are operas that want to tell us something about the state of the Britain we live in. The first refracts Steven Berkoff's play of the same name through the Oedipus myth from which it derives, to portray a 90s Britain still in ruins after the Thatcher years. *Playing Away*, with a text by Howard Brenton, is more oblique: an opera about a footballer who has sold his soul to obtain complete mastery over the ball (and even the ball has its own aria).

Very contemporary, 'British' works, then. Except that both operas originate from commissions dispensed, not by British opera houses, but the Munich Biennale. The recording of *Greek* (the opera has been seen in Edinburgh and London) is pretty much an all-British affair, although conductor Bernard is an American, and *Playing Away* is very much a joint venture between the Biennale and Opera North in Leeds. But neither opera would exist without the originating impulse in Germany. And as if to underline the debt, Judith Weir's *Blond Eckbert* is based on an 18th-century story by the German writer Ludwig Tieck. Perhaps opera and the British don't go together quite so readily after all.

At least, that's the line Mark Anthony Turnage seems to take. "I've never felt comfortable going into an opera house. Perhaps I'm intimidated by the idea of opera. I don't feel comfortable with it. I don't think opera houses welcome composers, they're very suspicious, and that's not a new thing. That's probably why I haven't written another opera since *Greek*, and why I picked such a controversial piece to make an opera from, so as to be deliberately antagonistic."

Antagonistic. That's one way to describe the wilfully aggressive posture which *Greek* adopts. Certainly, it's the first opera CD

to carry a 'Parental Advisory' sticker. Although Turnage and his co-writer Jonathan Moore deleted some of the expletives when they adapted Berkoff's text, plenty remain, and they are delivered with gusto by the singers. Turnage himself admits that he still feels the rhetorical force of the effing and blinding. "I hadn't heard the piece since we recorded it in 1992, so when I got the CD, I put it on, and the language is so clear, it really hits you. There's a forcefulness about it, although I don't think it is particularly radical. I thought they were only going to put a sticker on in America, but it seems they have to put one on here as well. I'm always amazed people get worked up about it. I suppose it might not actually harm it."

For the recording, Turnage insisted that the singers, although fully conversant with classical notation and operatic singing styles, should not adopt a 19th-century *bel canto* delivery, which so often obliterates text. "I assume opera singers, and opera house audiences, like that style," he says. "I'm someone who doesn't. The way opera singers are trained is very unnatural. It restricts a lot of things. The voices in *Greek* are not the typically wobbly operatic voices. Obviously certain words will get lost in the singing, but that thing that Auden said, that in opera you only hear one word in seven, is very dangerous. It's tricky, but a composer should aim for every word to be heard."

Turnage was born in 1960; *Greek* was first performed in 1988. It's a remarkably assured piece for such a young composer. Given its success — multiple stagings, including an Italian production, a BBC TV version, the Argo recording — it's surprising that Turnage hasn't returned to the operatic idiom. Only now is he beginning to think about the commission he has received from English National Opera, for a new work to be performed in 1997/8. His provisional subject is Sean O'Casey's tragicomic play, *Juno And The Paycock*. In the meantime he has not been short of work.

Between 1989 and 1993 he was Composer In Association with The City Of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, an association which taught him a lot. "It was a friendly environment. It made me more practical. I learned a lot about orchestration, especially working with Simon Rattle, who tends to be very hands-on. A specific example: a lot of viola parts in my orchestral writing up till then were not really being heard, you would sometimes think the viola didn't have to be there. It was good having the stability of four years' salary, and they would try pieces out six months before the premiere. That meant I could take more risks. I didn't have the embarrassment of finding out they didn't work at the premiere."

Currently, Turnage is looking forward to a performance of some of his pieces arranged for The Creative Jazz Orchestra by Mike Gibbs. "I'm flattered, intrigued and fascinated by the idea of a jazz composer's view of my music. A big influence on me is someone like Gil Evans — his work with Miles Davis. The same with Mingus. But I don't understand how they do it. The reason I like jazz is because it's the opposite of what I do. If I could express myself through an instrument — which I can't — I would prefer to play jazz. But because I can't, I'm reluctant to allow someone to improvise in my music. They might come up with something that would be incongruous. I'm a bit of a dictator to be honest, which is probably not a healthy thing!" □

Mark Anthony Turnage's composition Kai is premiered in London this month by the London Sinfonietta. See Sounding Off for details. Greek is out now on Decca/Argo. A CD of four Turnage compositions (including Kai), performed by The City Of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (conducted by Simon Rattle), will be released in July by EMI. Benedict Mason's Playing Away will be premiered by Opera North in Leeds this month. See Sounding Off for details.



Shaka

an A of

a is for **Alpha & Omega**

The odd couple of 90s roots and culture. Bassist Christine Woodbridge and melodica puffer John Sprosen conjure cultural spirits in (of all non-ive places) Plymouth. Their new album, *Safe In The Ark*, is their seventh in just a few years. Alongside other roots revivalists such as Forward Roots Collective or The Wobbly Wobbly World Of Music, A&O are either pointless retro or facsimiles with substance, depending on your point of view. For the stoned, shuffling followers of such roots clubs as House Of Roots or Jah Shaka's tribal meetings at The Rocket, however, the question is irrelevant.

b is for **Dennis Bovell**

The pioneering UK producer whose 70s work moved between lovers rock (Janet Kay's "Silly Games"), dub-into-punk experimentalism (The Pop Group, Sits, Orange Juice), the first wave of UK roots consciousness (Steel Pulse, Linton Kwesi Johnson) and his own sly, sonic explorations (*Ah Who Seh? Go Deh*, *Strictly Dubwise*). Bovell has recently emerged from a long period of obscurity to take his rightful place in the 90s roots revival with a new album, *Dub Dem Silly*. B also stands for Beyond, the Birmingham label that compiled *Ambient Dub* into three digestible albums, showcasing the Techno dub of electronic experimentalists such as Original Rockers, Banco De

Gaia, APL and HIA. And B must also stand for Bandulu, who put the dub into London Techno, Bad Brains, who did the same for DC hardcore, and Blind Idiot God, who did the same for NYC avant metal. (Now argue that dub isn't the most pervasive musical form of the age.)

c is for **Cyberdub**

Iconic in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* ("the long pulse of Zion dub") as the humanistic healing force in a wired world, a naive touch of natural magic, dub has become a so-fi soundtrack for techno-Gaians, hippie zippies and cyborg armists. C also stands for Crusties. The perfect environment for observing the evolution of the crustie look during the 80s was at Gary Clarr's On-U Sound System parties, where the white rasta look of blond dreadlocks and ratty paramilitary fatigues interlocked with On-U's mix of urban noise terror and spiritual bass. (For a contemporary picture of the dub/Crusties/Travellers nexus see *Spiral Tribe*, *Back To The Planet*, *Ozric Tentacles*, etc).

d is for **Digi Dub**

Dub in the post-analogue era (listen to Sly & Robbie's "Computer Malfunction"), or Digi Dub, the south east London sound system posse of remixers and neo-dub recordists. Also stands for Dub, the all-purpose syllable of nowness, as in *The Dub Club*, *Dub Federation*,

Brothers Love Dubs, Dub Funk Association and so on and so on

e is for **Echo Chamber (Johnny In The...)**

The landscape paintbox, the time stretcher, the resonance amplifier, the warp factor. Echo is the fundamental device of dub, throwing words into caves, repeating beats for an infinity, transforming the one-drop into a boom full of dread. Only the bass (as low as it can go) is free of echo

f is for **Prince Far-I**

In 1980 *Cry Tuff Dub Encounter Chapter Three* helped make explicit the late 70s London punk/roots reggae equation (see Dennis Bovell, above, plus RIL, Pop Group, Sits, etc), fusing Far-I's subterranean growl with contributions from An U, Steve Beresford, Vivien Goldman (and not forgetting yourself, David — Ed). Far-I's burnt toasting subsequently added extra dread to many UK dub tracks released by Adrian Sherwood, the innovative Manchester-based Suns Of Arqa and Warrington's self-styled Minister Of Noise, Sir Freddie Voodoo (his "Marvel Of Miracles (Prayer To Tubby Mix)" is the place where industrial noise, Ambient and dub shamanism finally meet)

g is for **Walter Gibbons**

Born again Christian Walter Gibbons pioneered the disco remix



Nusrat



Bad Brains

David Toop is your guide
on our whistlestop tour
through the echo
chamber.

-Z

alongside producer Tom Moulton. His 12" mix of Betty LaVette's late 70s disco stormer, "Don't Let the Best I Can", opened New York dance to the potential of dub deconstruction. Followed in the early 80s by extremes in dub breakdown performed by Francois Kervorkian, Shep Pettibone, Larry Levan, Jellybean and Nick Martinelli with David Todd.

h is for **Keith Hudson**

Co-credited to Family Man Barrett, the late Keith Hudson's 1976 *Pick A Dub* was one of the first dub albums. Stuttering melodic, squelching keyboard and guitar chops and a mix which dropped instruments in and out of the sound picture every few bars made this one a must-have. Also seek out his "Satan Side" cut, one of the strangest, spookiest records ever made, dub or otherwise.

i is for **Imagination**

Mid-80s soul 'n' sleaze trio which countered a series of dodgy Top Of The Pops appearances with their *Night Dubbing* album in 1983. Of interest for a Larry Levan remix of "Changes" but unfortunately held back from the outer regions of dub strangeness by sucrose harmonies and inflexible bass lines.

j is for **Jah Shaka**

London based disciple of roots, dub and culture whose sound system is legendary for its vibrational force.

During the 80s, when dub was becoming a forgotten art, Shaka the Zulu kept his faith, gradually finding a new audience for his all-night club sessions among the dispossessed (from white rastas to House refugees). J is also for Jungle Techno, which mixes the cut-up craziness of Lee Perry and the deep, dark flavour of King Tubby with the accelerated breakbeat motion of the 90s.

k is for **King Tubby**

The inventor of dub and thus one of the most influential, underrated players in the backroom history of popular music. For prime tracks and solid history check *King Tubby's Special 1973-1976*, released on Trojan, compiled and annotated by

Steve Barrow. A sound engineer for Duke Reid's Treasure Isle Records in the late 60s, Tubby found that his instrumental dubs of popular tunes caused a sensation at the sound systems. From that point, he worked with almost every major Jamaican artist, twisting their original tunes into vast landscapes of crashing snare drums and chest crushing bass. Tubby was shot dead in Kingston in 1989.

l is for **Latin HipHop**

Crash and boom in the mix, courtesy of Arthur Baker, Chris Barbosa, Mantronix and The Latin Rascals. In the New York of the early 80s, Latin HipHop, or freestyle, evolved from electro, an orgy of computer game dubbing



and Vocoder voices which reached dizzy heights of future-tack with the Jonzun Crew, Warp 9, Hashem and The Egyptian Lover. Discarded by rappers, electro was turned into pop music by Latin Hi-Hoppers — Babie & Keyes, Amoreto, Shannon — and then dubbed to smithereens.

m is for **Mad Professor**

Anwa Sounds' (UK) resident bottin of flange, delay and other techniques of ecstasy. Prolific throughout the dub desert of the 80s, his album titles describe his warped journeys through the echo chamber. *Psychodelic Dub*, *Adventures of A Dub Sampler*, *Science And The Witch Doctor* and *Who Knows The Secrets Of The Master Tapes?* His "Towers Of Dub" remix for The Orb was an epic of the genre. M also stands for Minimalism, exemplified by Herman Chin-Loy's mysterious *Aquamus Dub* album.

n is for **Nu Groove**

In the late 80s, the Burrell twins (Ronnie and Rhyll) formed a label for their deeper, darker, dubber view of New York Garage. While most New York DJs were mixing dull instrumental versions of House tracks and calling them dubs, Nu Groove was pioneering some radical reconstructions. Listen to the Ronnie Burrell/Tommy Musto dub of Bas Nor's "I'm Glad You Came To Me" or the Bobby

dub



Pablo

Konders/Peter Daou contributions to the label ("The Poem" 12" and the Vandal EPs, especially) Nu Groove is now defunct and highly collectable

O is for On-U Sound

Adrian Sherwood has been making 21st century dub since the 1970s with Creation Rebel, African Headcharge, Singers & Players, Dub Syndicate and a host of other artists. Often wildly experimental with studio techniques, sometimes running whole tracks in reverse, his mix services have been used by the likes of Depeche Mode, yet he still runs his On-U Sound label, working with Little Annie, Little Axe and similarly small but potent acts. David Lynch used "Far Away Chant" by African Headcharge for the torture scene in *Wild At Heart* (but then excluded it from the soundtrack album). O also stands for The Orb, who have fused dub, Techno and Ambient into an all-purpose listening, dancing, head nodding soundtrack for our hyperspatial era.

P is for Pablo

Augustus, of course, the incredibly prolific JA producer whose dubbed-up melodica instrumentals were the blueprint for devotional roots music. Without such albums as *King Tubby's Meets Rockers Uptown*,

Africa Must Be Free By 1983 Dub and *East Of The River Nile* you don't have a dub collection. At the time of writing, Pablo was remixing tracks for (of all people) Creation's indie posters The Boo Radleys. P also stands for plates, the special pressings of dub mixes made exclusively for sound systems.

Q is for Qawwali Dub

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's "Must Must", as remixed by Massive Attack, was a landmark convergence of Sufi Qawwali singing and Bristol dub vibes. For other significant "world dubs", seek out Paul "Groucho" Smylie's reconstructions of Jugu tracks by King Sunny Ade and Delé Aboodun, or the Addis Ababa dubs on Tony Allen's Afrobeat album *Never Expect Power Always*.

R is for Arthur Russell

Yet another dub pioneer who is no longer with us, Russell played cello, studied Indian music and wrote minimalist compositions. He also made disco records when he could, mixing cello, hand drums, jazzy keyboards and wistful, ectoplasmic singing, then handing over the tapes to Walter Gibbons for dub warping. "Let's Go Swimming", "Go Bang! #5" and "Schoolbell/Treehouse" still push back the boundaries of dance, while the much coveted *World Of*

Echo explores the meditative environment of dub space.

S is for Scientist

Second generation Jamaican dub mixer and a rival to Prince Jammy. Notable for his theme albums (with lund cover art) on which he would meet and vanquish protagonists from off-world regions: ie *Scientist Meets The Space Invaders*, *Scientist Encounters Pac Man*. Such meetings, derived from the rivalry of the sound clash, are central to the mythology of dub. For origins, seek out *King Tubby Meets The Upsetter At The Grass Roots Of Dub*.

T is for Tricky

Along with Portishead, Tricky is Bristol's latest contribution to dirt slow and schizophrenically strange music with roots in Hip-hop jams, splitting up and dub encounters. For origins, look back to The Wild Bunch, then Massive Attack, Smith & Mighty, Nellie Hooper. For results, see *Soul II Soul* and Björk.

U is for Upsetter

Also known as Scratch, the great Lee Perry, whose darning at the mix controls was beyond compare during the period (mid to late 70s) when he was making dub albums such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Super Ape*. Unlike many other dub mixers, Scratch disrupted his more commercial songs with dub effects — "Cow Thief Skank", "Bathroom Skank", "Police And Thieves" — and made whole albums with singers that throbbled and groaned in a bizarre counterpoint to their efforts. Always an eccentric (he once torched his legendary Kingston Black Ark studios to the ground), his recent music has seen him descend into self-parody and (possibly) actual (as opposed to sonic) madness.

V is for Virtual Dub

Dub extended recording studio techniques, effecting an important step in the conceptual shift from the studio as a miked-up performing space to the studio as a virtual space for manipulating sound (for results, see the last ten years of popular music).

W is for Warriors Dance

Nigerian producer Tony Addie's London-based label. From its Addis Ababa studio, No Smoke's "Koro-Koro Dub Dance" exemplified the UK street mix of Jamaican and Nigerian music versus Japanese technology. W is also for Wobble, as in Jah, who can dubwise any music in town — from PIL to Primal Scream — with that low bass pulse.

X is for X-Ray

Often described as a process analogous to the X-ray, dub strips music back to the bones, exposing the structural framework.

Y is for Yamaha Skank

The first "version" album, compiled by Rupert Edwards in 1974. Containing 12 versions of one rhythm, "My Conversation", Yamaha Skank is the ancestor of the promotional two pack 12" of celebrity DJ mixes, remixes and silly name dubs. Y also stands for Yabby U, yet another dub pioneer of the 70s.

Z is for Zoe

Zoe's "Red Dublands" (1992) is just one example of the dub alchemy of UK producer Tony Thorpe, aka Moody Boyz. Other highly desirable dubs from Thorpe include his "Bad Man" 12" of last year, "Free" from the 1990 *Journey into Dubland* EP, or his new album, *Product Of The Environment*. □



Adrian Sherwood

PETE NAMLOOK and Dr. ATMO



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rudo

youth



of today

As well as being label mates of Guns N' Roses and Nirvana, Sonic Youth are founder members of a 90s experimental jet set, leading rock into new, uncharted territories. Jakubowski spoke to group members Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo in London.

From the days (NYC, early 80s) when Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo would play in Glenn Branca's massed guitar orchestras, and when Thurston would moonlight as an occasional member of The Swans, the four members of Sonic Youth have had a reputation for extending their musical activities way beyond the confines of the group.

"Either we have a broad range of interests," Lee Ranaldo observes wryly, "or we're dilettantes." Which is another way of saying that since signing to Geffen in 1989, the group have either developed a genuinely eclectic, multi-genre aesthetic, or have become, to turn the title of their new album against them, members of an experimental jet set, fitting from one project to the next with a flaneur's sense of abandon and detachment. When Thurston announces that he'll play with anyone, Lee laughs. But you get the impression that he's only half joking.

Whichever way you look at it, the amount of extra-Youth activity is remarkable. There's Free Kitten, bassist Kim Gordon's Riot Grrrl project with Julie Cafritz (ex-Pussy Galore) and Boredoms drummer Yoshimi. There's Steve Shelley drumming with the reformed Raincoats, and playing with the bizarre American guitarist Jad Fair in Mosquito. Thurston has just done the soundtrack album for *Backbeat*, the film about the Stu Sutcliffe/Starclub, Hamburg-era Beatles, alongside members of Nirvana, REM and The Lemonheads ("The paycheck was good," he says), and he continues to release free jazz records by Arthur Doyle, Frank Lowe and Rudolph Grey on his Ecstatic Peacecat label. He's also working with Lee Ranaldo in Gate, a collaboration with New Zealander Michael Morley (of The Dead C) and Japanese noise guitarist Keijo Hano. Lee, in turn, has been mailing tapes to Morley, while both have contributed 7" singles to a series showcasing guitarists put out by the Californian label Table Of The

Elements. Thurston has a trio with Steve Shelley, and Lee has been touring multimedia pieces around Europe and America.

Both are bringing solo projects to London in May. Thurston is due to play the London Musicians' Collective festival as a solo improviser, while Lee will perform his multimedia pieces as part of a special LMC sponsored section of the London Jazz Festival.

"I'm actually working on a record that's pretty much defining for me," says Lee, referring to his interest in the possibilities of multimedia. "[It includes] a lot of text I've written, road journals and diaries, and tape music and guitar music. It won't have the film component, obviously, which is a strong element of live. The last solo record [*From Here To Eternity*, 1986] is pretty monodynamic in terms of each track having one sound, and now it's got a lot more dense in terms of mixing things together. It's also got a little more sparse of late to make room for the text, so it's sort of atmospheric. I hesitate to call it Ambient."

Along with their reputation for extra-curricular activity, Sonic Youth are notorious for boosting the careers of their favourite groups. In recent years their tours have provided support slots for Mudhoney, The Boredoms, Huggy Bear, Pavement and, most spectacularly, Nirvana. In fact it was Thurston Moore's unofficial role as an A&R man for Geffen that landed Nirvana on the label, put Grunge on the map, and gave the group the opportunity to document the whole process via their 1991 *The Year Punk Broke* video, a documentary record of the moment when American alternative rock broke cover and



went platinum. It's a process which, they say, gives them an additional means of interacting with the scene that nurtures them, and one which differs from the approach of the equally beneficent Steve Albini, who stamps his seal of approval on a group via one of his innumerable production jobs.

"I hate producing records," says Thurston. "I get asked all the time, but I'm a bit suspicious that there's a celebrity quotient attached. It's the same thing as doing outside projects like the LMC festival, which pretty much caters to an audience that wants to hear fairly advanced improvisors like Evan [Parker] or Derek [Bailey]. Why am I the American representative of improvisation? It's not really my history. I have a history as a musician, but it's not a way that I play or have played, although, of course, improvisation has been a part of Sonic Youth's milieu. So I'm suspicious that it's more celebrity driven, although I also think that the people at the LMC are genuinely intrigued by the fact that I work with other improvisors, so maybe there's some kind of credence in me being there."

"When we started," Lee adds, "there was an entire improviser's scene in New York, with people like Elliott Sharp and John Zorn, and we were definitely outside of that."

"When you get interested in that scene there's a new world of musicians that you find out about," says Thurston. "When we first started going to see Zorn doing his duck calls we thought he was some perverse individual in a vacuum. I was quite unaware that it was connected to the whole FMP and Incus scenes, and all the different factions of European improvisors, or even the American scenes in the South that you were never aware of because they were so obscure. It's funny that just now that stuff is actually getting publicity, and you see kids in their twenties who are very aware of Keijo Haino and Derek Bailey."

"Part of that is how factional the music scene's gotten at this point," says Lee. "It's so fractured and fragmented that it's equally valid to delve into that kind of stuff. It's to do with people becoming so familiar with something to the point where they're looking for other horizons. That degrades all that other stuff."

The group's new album, *Experimental Jet Set, Trash And No Star*, although not quite a return to the experimental highs of 1986's *EVOl*, is still resolutely uncommercial and removed from the rock mainstream. Taken alongside the group's interest in the worlds of Riot

Grrrl, Japanese hardcore, free improvisation and the revived 60s free jazz of Doyle, Grey and Charles Gayle, you get the impression of rats leaving a sinking ship. With rock undergoing a rapid and advanced decomposition (the Grunge scene that they once so rigorously championed is already exhausted), Sonic Youth seem to want to steer the survivors onto a new course, abandoning rock and making the move over to a more open ended, jazz based way of working. In fact, it's already happening.

"Listen to some of Huggy Bear's B sides," says Thurston. "Whether they know it or not, they're working with a similar intent to the free stuff. It's a world punk always professed to encapsulate, and now it is. It's funny that there's this scene that's been going on since the 60s that's now very hip to young people. I find that hilarious, because that kind of thing didn't exist in the late 70s or early 80s. But on an underground level I don't see any difference between the 60s free scene and the records being released on labels like K or Kill Rock Stars, because it's the same sort of economy. I find it really exciting. If Ecstatic Peace! is anything it's a Riot Grrrl label."

"In the States there's a whole network of small tiny holes in the wall where a lot of these people can play," adds Lee. "You can go sit in a room no bigger than this and see somebody play. For better or worse, because these people don't make any money — like Charles Gayle lives in a squat — but there's still places they can go to work stuff out without having to get rock 'n' rollers interested to present it."

It's been obvious for some time that the more adventurous of contemporary rock musicians have been going the way of jazz (in terms of being more open to experimentation). Grunge now looks like a blip in rock's demise, an Indian Summer in the permanent winter of declining sales and market share. What wasn't so obvious was the way rock musicians would take this alternative future so literally, with groups such as Moonshake deploying saxophone players, Main hanging out with Derek Bailey, or lo-fi acts like Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 indulging in freerform, semi-improvised material. More than ever, Sonic Youth's idea of a music that can contain Derek Bailey and The Boredoms, Riot Grrrl and Charles Gayle, looks like an accurate weathervane for the future direction of post-Generation X rock. □

Experimental Jet Set is released on Geffen this month. See *Sounding Off* for details of Moore and Randall's May London appearances.



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Today's more adventurous rock groups are embracing technology and the avant garde to forge a new genre: Post-rock. In the fourth of our articles on Music In The 21st Century, Simon Reynolds talks to Main, Seefeel and Disco Inferno, and looks to a future where riffs and powerchords will be replaced by virtual zones, machine time and the cyborg interface.

Like a clapped out stretch limo cranked in reverse, today's 'alternative rock' is synonymous with a retreat to one of a number of period genres from rock history. For Primal Scream think *Exile On Main Street*-era Stones. For Suede think Ziggy-phase Bowie. In 1994, just six short years from a new millennium, this is where the money is at: in the musical equivalent of reproduction antiques.

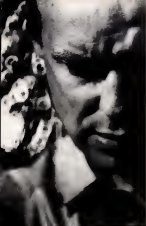
Recently, however, a smattering of British groups, energised by developments in electronic studio based musics such as Techno and HipHop, as well as free improvisation and the avant garde, have started venturing into a more financially precarious, but aesthetically vital hinterland-without-a-name. The roll call of futurist honour includes Disco Inferno, Seefeel, Insides, Bark Psychosis, Main, Papa Sprain, Stereolab, Pram and Moonshake, along with such prolific figures as Kevin Martin (Ice/Techno-Animal/God/EAR) and ex-Napalm Death drummer Mick Harris (Scorn/Lull).

What to call this zone? Some of its occupants, Seefeel for instance, could be dubbed 'Ambient', others, Bark Psychosis and Papa Sprain, could be called 'art rock'. 'Avant rock' would just about suffice, but is too suggestive of jerky time signatures and a dearth of melodic loveliness, which isn't necessarily the case. Perhaps the only term open ended yet precise enough to cover all this activity is 'post-rock'.

Post-rock means using rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, using guitars as facilitators of timbres and textures rather than riffs and powerchords. Increasingly, post-rock bands are augmenting the traditional guitar/bass/drums line up with computer technology: the sampler, the sequencer and MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). While some post-rock units (Pram, Stereolab) prefer lo-fi or outmoded technology, others are evolving into cyber rock, becoming virtual



PHOTOS: A POST-ROCK ASSEMBLAGE. CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: PRAM; INSIDE; MOONSHAKE; ICE; DISCO INFERNO; BARK PSYCHOSIS; PAPA SPAN (BY PETER MORRIS); PAIN; CIRCLED: SQUIRREL.



“ I’m not
interested in
records as a
document
of a
rock band
playing on stage. ”

— Eno to Bono

The best way to get a handle on how these groups depart from the ‘rock process’ is to work from a rigorous model of how the traditional rock ‘n’ roll band operates. And there’s none more rigorous than Joe Carducci’s *Rock And The Pop Narcotic* (published in 1990 by Redoubt, with a revised edition planned for later this year). Carducci may be a bit of a reactionary, but his theory of rock is grounded in a precise, materialist definition of it as music, rather than ‘attitude’, ‘spirit’, ‘rebellion’, or any other metaphysical notions. Rock’s essence, says Carducci, is the real-time interaction of drums, bass and rhythm guitar. A band should be a rhythmic engine creating kinetic energy, ‘breathing’ as an organic entity.

Carducci valorises the strenuous, collective physicality of performance. His ideal rock process is opposed to the Pop Method, which is studio based and elevates the producer over the musicians. Modern music is a sterile, frigid wasteland because the producer/studio (‘cold’) has triumphed over rock (‘hot’). With a typically American prejudice, Carducci favours the ‘presence’ of live performance over the increasingly ‘virtual’ nature of studio music, and prefers the ‘documentarian’ recording techniques that characterised early 70s hard rock, which were revived by Spontaneous Music Ensemble at SST, the seminal 80s hardcore punk label that Carducci co-founded.

If Carducci has a polar opposite in rock theory, it’s that archetypal boffin in the sound lab, Brian Eno. In fact, the art rock tradition that Eno stands for and which is crucial to the development of today’s post-rock, is something like an egghead version of the Tin Pan Alley pop process that Carducci detests; there’s a line running from Phil Spector and Brian Wilson that leads to Eno as clearly as it does to, say, Trevor Horn. Both

the Spector and Eno approaches to soundscaping involve using musicians as a sort of palette of textures, as opposed to the rock band’s collective toil. Increasingly, the post-Eno approach involves dispensing with musicians altogether in favour of machines.

Another way in which Eno is the prophet of post-rock is his elevation of timbre/texture/chromatics over riffs and rhythm sections, the desire to create a ‘fictional psycho-acoustic space’ rather than groove and thrust. When he was invited to produce U2 (a band that Carducci reviles as the very model of non-rocking fraudulence) Eno warned Bono: ‘I’m not interested in records as a document of a rock band playing on stage. I’m more interested in painting pictures. I want to create a landscape within which this music happens.’ As it turned out, this subordination of the aural to the visual was perfect for Bono’s ‘visionary’ vocals, The Edge’s stratospheric guitar and the inert rhythm section.

Throughout Eno’s own oeuvre, there’s a gradual eradication of kinetic energy, beginning with the early solo LPs (with their limp, uneventful water colours and lyrical imagery of treading water) and culminating in the entropic, vegetative bliss of *Ambient*. The difference between the Carducci and Eno aesthetics is the difference between ‘manly’ manual labour and ‘effete’ white collar brainwork. Carducci actually calls his tradition (the blues-bastardising lineage that runs from Black Sabbath through Black Flag to Soundgarden) ‘new redneck’. By defending the aesthetic of ‘heavy’ (heavy rock, heavy industry) against studio-concocted ‘life’, Carducci wants to protect traditional artisan skills from being usurped by machines (which, in studios as much as factories, are more reliable and cheaper than humans). By contrast, the Enosites embrace technology that empowers the musically incompetent.

Carducci can’t make sense of the pop present, which is based in the soundsculpting innovations of dub, in disco’s remology and HipHop’s sampladelic sorcery. His version of rock history also downgrades psychedelia, which was the first music to use 24 track recording to conjure fictional headspace. ‘Phonography’ (a term that author Evan Eisenberg coined, in his book *The Recording Angel*, to describe the art of recording) bears the same relation to live music as cinema does to theatre. With most rock records, the studio is used to create a simulacrum of live performance, although multi-tracking makes it more vivid and hyper-real than ‘live’. But multi-tracking and other studio techniques can also be used to create ‘impossible’ events, which could never possibly take place in real time. The sampler, transubstantiating sound into digital data, takes this even further — different eras, different auras, can be combined to form a transchronic pseudo event. You could call this ‘magic’, you could call it ‘deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence’ — either way, today’s post-rock bands are absconding into this virtual, ethereal realm.

Post-rock draws its inspiration and impetus from a complex combination of sources. Some of these come from post-rock’s own tradition — a series of moments in history when eggheads and bohemians have hijacked elements of rock for non-rock purposes (think of the guitar based late 60s music of The Velvet Underground and Pink Floyd, and a subsequent lineage that includes New York’s No Wave groups, Joy Division, The Cocteau Twins, The Jesus And Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine and AR Kane, or the so-called ‘krautrock’ of Can, Faust, Neu, Cluster and Ash Ra Tempel, as well as the late 70s/early 80s post-punk vanguard of PIL, 23 Skidoo, Cabaret Voltaire and The Pop Group). Other impulses arrive from outside of rock. Eno, obviously, but also the mid-60s drone-minimalism of Terry Riley and LaMonte Young, as well as *musique concrète* and electroacoustic music, dub reggae and modern sampladelic genres like

HipHop and Techno. Most of the British post-rock groups also explicitly define themselves against Grunge, which was Carducci's dream come true: the fusion of punk and metal into an all-American nouveau hard rock.

For the post-rock bands, Sonic Youth's idea of "inventing the guitar" really means un-rocking the guitar, sometimes the next step is ditching the guitar altogether. Disco Inferno's Iain Crause says he always wanted to make his guitar sound like "actual physical things", such as waterfalls, but in DI's early days (when the group sounded closer to Joy Division and The Durutti Column) he had to do it with masses of effects. It's been said that DI decided to go digital after seeing those samplin', rockin' industrial muthas of invention The Young Gods live. But according to Crause, the real Damascus experience was hearing Hank Shocklee's Bomb Squad productions for Public Enemy. Inspired, Crause traded in his rack of pedals for a guitar synth, which he now rigs up to a MIDI so that each string triggers a different sample.

The results can be heard on the astounding LP *DI Go Pop*. "A Crash At Every Speed" samples Miles Davis's "Bitches Brew" and Industrial Improv Unit God, "Starbound" samples U2 and children's laughter, while the gorgeous "Footprints in Snow" samples Saint-Saëns's "Aquarium". Not that you can tell, since Crause "plays" these sample-tones rather than merely quoting them. Because he's using a fretboard rather than the usual keyboard, he can use all the guitarist's traditional devices — bending the strings ("It literally sounds like you're twisting the samples," he says), jamming and improvising. This results in unearthly ninth dimensional noises that bear no discernible link to the physical acts that generated them. (Perhaps even more disorientating is the group's approach to the drums. They use a MIDI-ed up kit whose pads also cue samples. On "Footprints", for instance, the tom-toms reproduce the sound of footsteps.)

Crause sees Disco Inferno as a "virtual reality band". But what's really interesting about them is the way they haven't totally abandoned the rock process: they combine the physicality of live performance with the wizardry of sampling. (Crause claims that *DI Go Pop* was recorded live, and that the group's future plans include using Marshall amps!)

Other post-rock bands are more affiliated to Techno. Insides compose on Cubase, a widely used computer music program that functions as a sort of "virtual tape recorder", according to the group's J Serge Tardo. "Cubase allows you to 'play' things you couldn't physically play," he says. Like a sequencer, it "remembers" a riff, motif or beat and reiterates it in any timbre, whether sampled or derived from a module (a sort of digital library of sounds, no bigger than a Kellogg's Pop Tart).

Insides' non-rock approach dates back to their earlier lo-fi incarnation as Earwig. "[In Earwig] we all played hermetically sealed patterns that overlapped but didn't gel. We'd play separately, in a sense," explains Tardo. Like systems musicians, Insides weave a tapestry of sound-threads, where Tardo's guitar features as just another insouciant figure. In fact, he says the greatest influence on his guitar playing is Kraftwerk!

Tardo prefers "the godlike position of manipulating the soundscape from the outside [the classic Spector/Eno role] as opposed to being in the mix, like a guitarist." When the group play live, improvisation figures only in the sense that "you can have a husk of sequencer patterns that you can mutate, like in a dub mix" (an approach which has direct parallels with the live performances of such Techno operatives as Orbital and Mixmaster Morris). Performance isn't strenuous in the Carducci sense, but it's mentally draining — "Like doing somersaults in your head," says Tardo.



The Cocteau
Twins



PHOTO: EDWARD SULLIVAN



Jesus And Mary Chain

Like *Disco Inferno* and *Insides*, *Seefeel* are one of those bands whose Year Zero coincides with the arrival of Joy Division and The Cure. And whose aesthetic is shaped by the late '80s dream pop of My Bloody Valentine and AR Kane. The latter awoke Seefeel's interest in sound-in-itself, which gradually led them to club based musics such as Techno and House. Of all the post-rock units, Seefeel have most avidly embraced Techno's methodology; appropriately, they've found a commercial niche in the 'electronic listening' genre (recently performing alongside Autechre and μ -zrq), and a home on its premier label, Warp.

Seefeel use a lot of guitars, but only as a source of timbre (all circus swirls and drone drifts). If it's mostly impossible to distinguish their guitar textures from the sequenced/sampled material, again it's because of Cubase, which, says Mark Clifford, allows them to "take two seconds of guitar and chop it into 1000 pieces, loop it, string it out for ten minutes, layer it, and so on." Similarly, Sarah Peacock's voice is not deployed expressively but used as material, the title track of Seefeel's imminent *Ch-Vox* EP (a one off for Richard 'Aphex Twin' James's Rephlex label) is composed entirely of her treated and timestretched vocal drone.

Live, the Techno process means that Justin Fletcher drums to a click-track, while the rest of the band must keep in sync with the pre-recorded parts. Not surprisingly, this is unwelcome, and they'd prefer to dispense with gigs altogether. Clifford's fantasy alternative would involve Seefeel creating an aural environment but not actually being the focal point on stage, which is closer to the process of club DJ'ing than being in a rock 'n' roll band.

A similar fantasy appeals to Robert Hampson of Main, who reckons "these could be the last days of gig going." He imagines organising "a live mix scenario, where we'd be hidden out of sight, behind a desk", a sort of avant rock sound system, in other words. Unsurprisingly, Main are primarily studio based, a sound laboratory. With Main, Hampson has returned to the experimental music he made before he formed the mid-'80s indie group Loop, which was based around tape loops and layers of processed guitars. Main have progressively shed Loop's vestigial rock traces, dispensing first with human drums, then with the drum machine. The percussion on their new LP *Moon Pool* is all sampled, and even this may eventually be replaced with pure ambience.

Hampson is a long time foe of the sampler, he says, and resorted to it reluctantly. Sometimes he prefers to physically play Main's most monotonous, uninflected, one chord riffs, because of the minuscule differences in attack and tone this produces. "To sample the chord and sequence it," he says, "would iron out the character, flatten the sound." As Main drift away from the rock process and the rock mainstream, they inevitably move closer to the avant garde, finding allies with contemporary improvisors and droneologists like Jim O'Rourke, Paul Schutze, AM's Eddie Prevost, Thomas Koner, KK Null and Jim Plotkin. A recent North London live showcase for *Moon Pool* made this connection explicit, with Main's two sets split by a free improvisation featuring O'Rourke, Schutze and Prevost.

Another key player in this area is Kevin Martin. He runs Pathological Records, leads the post-rock outfits God, Techno-Animal and Ice, and participates in the 'supergroup' E.A.R. (along with Sonic Boom, Kevin Shields of MBV and Eddie Prevost). From his own experience as a producer and bandleader, Martin reckons that "working with technology, you become fond of machine time and fed up with the fallibility of human time." God is his most traditional project, since it's about combative improvisation and physical effort, "the sparks and flashpoints that come from human elements. I see God as a relic of

another time, which is why we have images of burnt out locomotives on the covers."

God LPs (a new one, *The Anatomy Of Addiction*, is imminent) straddle jamming spontaneity and studio mixology. By contrast, Ice and Techno-Animal were both conceived with no thought of live performance. For those units, Martin was (like *Disco Inferno*'s Ian Crause) heavily influenced by Public Enemy, specifically the way Hank Shocklee's production situates a song's dynamic in the vertical, not the horizontal. "The shifting layers of frequencies, not the development of verse-chorus narrative," says Martin. "Of course, you could say the same about Jeff Mills or Stakker Humanoid. But Shocklee, on *Fear Of A Black Planet*, was the first to use sampling to pile on the intensities, rather than just quote obvious riffs, he took the peaks of other songs, like trumpet solos, and layered them densely."

Many of his kindred spirits on the avant rock peripheries — Robert Hampson, Mick Harris, Justin Broadrick (Godflesh/Final) — are embracing digital technology, and Martin thinks that's because digital sound appeals to control freaks. "[These musicians] are a bit solipsistic, they like to control all aspects of what they do. Also, as the audience for adventurous music contracts, they get less interested in playing live, it doesn't pay, and instead retreat to their home fortresses and surround themselves with machinery. I think that connects to what's going on in society as a whole — a process of atomisation and disconnection. Digital also appeals because it allows you to break down structure."

Despite the 'cold' accuracy of digital sound, Martin sees post-rock retaining some kind of primal energy. It's not physical in the Carducci sense, but "a different kind of friction, the kind that comes with people wanting to interface and integrate themselves with machinery. It's like Lee Perry saying he wanted the mixing desk to take him over, or Can talking about machines having souls. People feel outdated by machinery. So they're taking on technology, but using it to unleash primal energy."

So perhaps the really provocative area for future development lies not in cyber rock but cyborg rock, not the wholehearted embrace of Techno's methodology, but some kind of interface between real time, hands-on playing and the use of digital effects and enhancement. As Kevin Martin points out: "Even in the digital age, you still have a body. It's the connection between 'Techno' and 'Animal' that's interesting." □



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cave dweller



On his latest album, *Let Love In*, Nick Cave has discarded the Biblical fury and swampland mythology of old, in favour of personal confession and affairs of the heart.

Story by Robert Yates. Photography by Patrick Harrison.

"I've always wanted to write a death song," says Nick Cave, conforming playfully to type. "Someone else's of course." He is talking about "Cassell's Song", which he wrote for the soundtrack of *Forroway*, So Close, Wim Wenders's new film, and the wry qualification is typical. Despite the thousands of printed words to the contrary — interviews with Cave have often seemed like excuses for chatter about the nature of evil — visiting Nick Cave at home is not a trip into the heart of darkness. Indeed, when he ushers me into the back garden den of his North Kensington house, clearing away his child's toys and heartily recommending fatherhood, I half expect tips on interior design to follow.

Cave has a new album, *Let Love In*, to talk about — an absorbing collection of skewed torch songs and confessionals recorded with his regular group The Bad Seeds. He answers questions with a care to be precise and comprehensive, but with a measure of self-deprecation that precludes earnestness. Moving away from the storytelling of *Let Love In*'s predecessor, *Henry's Dream*, Cave has returned to putting together tracks which are fragments of autobiography. He considers the "story type songs", which he finds easy to write, lesser achievements: they are a mark of having "nothing to say." This time, he evidently had plenty on his mind.

"I never usually go into a record with decisions made about its direction," he says. "But with *Let Love In* I was sure that I was going to get away from tales. There are times when things in your life accumulate, and it becomes clear that you have to get rid of them, and this was one of them."

On *Let Love In*, the autobiographical material forges songs which are recognisable dispatches from Caveland. Not a theme park for gloomy teens, but the sort of discrete world no other contemporary songwriter so readily conjures up. His diction draws heavily on Biblical imagery and crime fiction. The landscapes of his songs — and of his novel, *And The Ass Saw The Angel* (1989) — often suggests the American Deep South (for his version of it, shaped, he admits, after spending one night in Georgia).

Among his characters, freaks or outsiders are the norm. Some seem to come straight out of Hollywood Westerns, as often does the music, which carries the imprint of Ennio Morricone's soundtracks, alongside country blues, rockabilly, supper club jazz and French chanson. In this bastard kingdom, Cave likes to play out highly strung dramas of good and evil: nature is charged (seas rage, skies storm) and the supernatural, especially the devil, is palpable.

Listing the make up of Caveland it's clear that there is plenty of scope for mawkish, cloying product, for music hall melodrama. And indeed, Cave talks of his interest in cheap effects, in crude musical gestures and cliché. He likes the lyric that comes from the heart, and has described how he becomes choked up listening to Louis Armstrong's "Wonderful World", which he has recorded with the ex-Pogues singer Shane MacGowan. He is drawn to the glitz (or corn, depending on your sympathies) of Vegas-era Presley. What Cave aspires to wrestle from the cliché, however, is genuine, clearly stated emotion. Some of his more straightforward attempts at the moving epic are collected on *The Good Son* (1990), whose titles — "The Weeping Song", "The Ship Song", "The Witness Song" — aspire to the simple, definitive statement.

Cave says he hates the popular, Oprah Winfrey-style mania for confession and its grotesque elaborations. "It's a complete racket, that sort of thing. It used to repulse me, now I see it as a symptom of a mad culture [ie America, a country which Cave, ironically, professes no love for]. What I can't tolerate is when somebody stands up and says 'I've been beating my kids for ten years,' and everybody cheers." Even so, on "Thirsty Dog", a track from the new album, Cave makes his own stab at the public confessional, listing past offences which he now regrets. The lyric is in fact addressed to his wife. Among other things, Cave is sorry for offending her friends, maintaining a "three year war", and for "forgetting how to fuck." He had second thoughts about recording the song but he hopes that his 'confessionals' are not about soliciting easy redemption. Besides, he ended up masking the personal elements of the song with a jaunty melody and employing some comic deflation in the lyrics.

A regular feature in Cave's work is this tension between the impulse to open up personal wounds and the urge to deflate atmosphere by lyrics that are either caustic or just plain funny. Still, the Caveland dispatches can sometimes seem overwhelmingly bleak. Although, by way of explanation, he says, "I enjoy the pleasures of my life just living them, but my frustrations I vent by writing, so consequently you get lots of morbid, angry, pissed off songs."

A significant constant in Cave's interviews — even noticeable in the mid-80s, when most media profiles fixed upon his "depraved" life in Berlin (he now divides his time between homes in London and Brazil) — is his respect for working hard and working well. He would rail against "lazy people not having a right to criticise [his] work." Critics figured prominently among his lazy people.

The appeal of a 'proper job' is strong, an urge which he seems to fulfil

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by completing commissioned pieces of work on time. "If someone like Wim Wenders calls me up and he gives me a rough outline of what he wants, and maybe some rough cuts of the film, I see the project as an exercise which I am very happy to do." (Apart from *Faraway, So Close*, Cave has worked with Wenders on songs for *Wings Of Desire*, which he also performed in, and *Undel The End Of The World*.)

Cave enjoyed the widespread acclaim which *And The Ass Saw The Angel* received, and he considers writing the novel — over three, often convulsive, years — his finest achievement. He perceives a hierarchy of art forms, with the novel sitting on top of the pile: "I wish I didn't think that, it's a pompous attitude. I just enjoy reading, and the written word, far more than I do music."

Cave reads fiction non-stop ("I'm addicted to a good yarn," he says). He becomes most animated when he leaps from his chair to show me a prized possession, a copy of James Ellroy's *White Jaz* in which the author has written a dedication to Cave: "Feel the rock 'n' roll evil chords of doom." "Ellroy hates rock 'n' roll," says Cave, "but he likes me, which I'm very pleased about."

If you add in Cave's recollections of how, back in the Australia of his youth, his father drilled into him the importance of books, it would be easy to play psychoanalyst with all of this stuff, declaring that there is an element of self-disregard in Cave's view of what he does, a feeling that there is something wrong with being a dirty rocker. But playing amateur psychoanalyst is not much fun with somebody as self-aware as Cave. Besides, his disregard for music is directed more towards other musicians than rock itself, and he knows his own worth (he has no interest in keeping up with current music, his listening consists of old favourites, chief among whom are John Lee Hooker and Morricone). He declines an offer of the mantle of a writer who sometimes works in music: "I do have another novel I'm playing around with in my head, but this other stuff is extra-curricular. Basically I'm a songwriter."

Don't underestimate the pleasure Cave takes from live performance. "If things are working well and I've transcended self-consciousness, I feel very elevated," he says. "On stage I can whip up enough frenzy so that afterwards I can't remember what went on." In this endeavour he is, of course, beautifully assisted by The Bad Seeds, who now seem to have settled into the regular line up of Mick Harvey, Blixa Bargeld, Die Haut's Thomas Wydler, sometime Triffid Martyn Casey, and Conway Savage. Cave once wrote, in an article collected in *King Ink* (1988), an anthology of his lyrics and occasional pieces of journalism, that when Bargeld, performing with Einstürzende Neubauten, screamed, it "sounded like somebody was pulling a thistle out of his soul." Bargeld can do similar things with his guitar. "Sometimes when I write tightly structured stuff," says Cave, "I can't see how it will contain Blixa, but his sense of what's right is uncanny."

In March, during a showcase gig at London's Tower Records, Cave apologised for being a middle aged man, before proceeding to busy himself with a display of high kicking and general rock performance



excess. To be an anonymous craftsman would not compare. "Sitting in a concrete bunker, tapping things out, and passing them through a hole in the wall is not really my idea of a satisfactory way to live your life."

Going against the grain of his opening comments, on "Lay Me Low" off the new album, Cave has written a premature obituary for himself, offering a tongue in cheek account of the sort of life he has lived and how he will be remembered after his death. He imagines what will follow his demise: there will be "informative six page features", and his fans will form a motorcade "ten miles long". His friends will mourn him but his enemies — represented in the lynch by the character of a police chief — "will breathe a sigh of relief" he'll say. "I was a malcontent, a badlander and a thief." Cave it in stone. □

“On stage I can whip up enough
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Medical Officers

Will Youssou N'Dour's new album cross over to an international audience? Or will it just confirm his status as Africa's greatest musician? Interview by Jo Shinner. Photography by Jonathan Oppong-Wiafe.

savannah dreams



"I called it *The Guide* because I am a guide in the context of modern Senegalese music. A guide is someone who has a lot of experience and can indicate the right path. There are many young people who believe in what I do and copy me. A griot can be a guide in

the African world. I am young but I am old in music because I have been in music for more than 20 years."

Youssou N'Dour is talking in a London hotel room about the reasoning behind the title of his forthcoming album, released, like the previous *Eyes Open*, on Spike Lee's Two Acres And A Mule label.

Youssou's pronouncements on himself and his music have something of a drop dead quality. I am a guide for my fellow Africans. This is true. Why do you have a problem with me saying this? It's an attitude born less of a rampant, misplaced ego (re: Fela Kuti) than the unassailable position he has occupied in Senegalese music over the last two decades. For most listeners (African or otherwise), and more than any other musician before him, Youssou N'Dour is the personification of modern African music.

Youssou's biography is familiar stuff by now. He began singing professionally aged 12. In his mid-teens he joined the

groundbreaking Etoile De Dakar, where he developed the mbalax sound, a complex sonic weave of traditional Wolof percussion, cyclical guitar patterns, influences from Cuba and the Congo, and, soaring gloriously over the top of it all, Youssou's high, golden Islamic-tinged wail of a voice. Over the next 15 years and a long sequence of recordings (his African cassette-only releases number in the hundreds), his music developed and hardened, moving from the seemingly effortless and impossibly alien textures (drawing on his ideas of Senegal, Latin America, Paris, New York and London) heard on the mid-80s *Immigrés* and *Nelson Mandela* albums (the two records which first brought him to the attention of an avid international audience), to the kind of knowing, hi-tech, one world fusions that can be heard today on *The Guide*.

"I think *The Guide* has the possibility to open a new door for African music in general," says Youssou, speaking in French. "I hope that people will have the chance to listen to African music that is a bit more modern."

These are words that have been spoken before, of course, and not just by, or in reference to, Youssou N'Dour: think back to The Bhundu Boys getting a support slot on a Madonna world tour, or the ecstatic critical receptions that greeted Salif Keita's Soro and Angelique Kidjo's *Logozo*, or even further back to Fela Kuti, Manu Dibango, Osibisa.

The problem for all of these musicians has been to reconcile the very different demands made by a huge African fan base, while at the same time pitching an international audience and media that, currently, seems more interested in white boy stadium rock and gangsta rap. In the past, Youssou experimented with releasing two albums simultaneously, one for each market, which only ended up shortchanging everyone concerned. Now he's suggesting that *The Guide* may succeed (where previous releases like *The Lion and Eyes Open* failed), because it was recorded in Dakar using African musicians, as opposed to Paris, surrounded by French session men and production values, but with a potentially wider, world market in mind.

The exception to the 'record it at home, sell it abroad' ethos is a duet with Neneh Cherry, co-written and recorded in New York. "Seven Seconds" blends their voices in a trance-like pop pulse. In an ideal world it would have the word 'hit' written all over it. "I've known Neneh for about five years. I knew her in Sweden and I really like her style," says Youssou. "Seven Seconds" concerns itself with the big issue: racism and its manifestation in banal, everyday violence. "Children are born into this world with a clean mind," says Youssou. "The first seven seconds are completely innocent. It is society which imposes racism." Why seven seconds, exactly? "Because it sounds best," he laughs, indicating that aesthetic and commercial imperatives can even be shoehorned into the war against intolerance and bigotry. "It could have been one, two or three seconds, but seven seems best from the song's point of view."

The Guide features a second 'international guest'. On "Without A Smile", that jobbing saxophonist Branford Marsalis blows a cool NYC jazz line while Youssou sings about a goat herder faced with dry and barren land who dreams of going to a village where it rains every day. It's a fine track, but one which generates the kind of bizarre, unconscious contradictions that arise when cultures come together

connected only by DAT tapes shuttling between studios in New York and Dakar. "I met Branford on the Amnesty tour," says Youssou, referring to Amnesty's 1988 'Human Rights Now' tour, which also featured Peter Gabriel, Sting, Bruce Springsteen and Tracy Chapman. "I think he was impressed with me because he used to try and copy my voice on his sax. When we were cutting this record in Dakar, I sent him a tape and said, 'OK, Branford. Now is your chance to really copy my voice.'"

In recent years Youssou has been singing in a mixture of Wolof, French and English. Following his lead, and despite obvious communication problems, he claims that English is now replacing French as the preferred second language of choice among the new wave of Dakar groups. "My English is the Youssou N'Dour version," he says. "I will never sing like the English but I sing how I feel it and that sounds good to me even if people have difficulties in understanding it."

One track on *The Guide*, "My People", gives some insight into the relationship that exists between African musicians and their audience. It's something which hinges on mutual respect and admiration, says Youssou. "There is a very strong link of love between me and my fans, they have supported me through difficult periods. Among them I have many friends who have helped me in many ways. Before I became so well known I had the opportunity and time to chat, visit and drink tea with them. Now that I can't do that so much, I want to tell them through the song that I feel as if I was with them." From our privileged, knowing position in the UK it's easy to gag on such comments, we are perhaps more used to the idea of a performer-fan relationship that hangs on the equation of star worship met by cynicism and contempt. But once again, his comments appear unanswerable and 100 per cent genuine.

That Youssou regards himself as an ambassador not just for Senegalese music but for the country itself, is evident on the new "Tourista" track. "I composed the song because I think that tourism links people around the world and promotes understanding. I receive my many friends from abroad and each time I persuade them not to stay in some grand hotel but to stay among the people. For me it's very important to go to a country and have contact there. We aren't perfect and sometimes people are frightened of Africa. So I say that it's good that people come and see us and that we should receive them with warm hospitality."

Even when that hospitality isn't always reciprocated? "Yes I don't want bitterness. We shouldn't behave badly towards other people if they behave badly towards us. We should eradicate this image Europeans have that Africans are savages." □

naked eye

Is Ron Fricke's

***Baraka* a World Music film for the 90s, or a cynical example of cultural exploitation?**

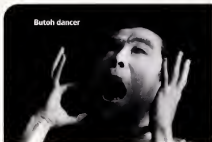
Richard Scott makes up his mind.

Released last year to wide critical acclaim, Ron Fricke's *Baraka* is a two hour collage of film, music and experimental sounds, without voice over, drawn from virtually every corner of the globe. It includes images of religious, spiritual and tribal rituals, nature, architecture and mass civilisation, the pyramids, an eclipse, Balinese Ramayana monkey chant, Butch dancers, whirling dervishes, Tokyo, Tanzania, the Taj Mahal, a temple of mirrors. The list is endless, mesmerising, dizzying. Cultures, musics, natural phenomena and extraordinary feats of human endeavour and tragedy merge into one another. Some incredibly beautiful images are captured, and the camera work and editing is superb, as is virtually every technical aspect of this seamless parade of sound and image. Fricke himself has described the film as "a journey of rediscovery that plunges into nature, history, the human spirit, and finally into the realm of the infinite." Nice sentiments, Ron, but wrong. *Baraka* is a stunningly empty piece of shit.

If you ever wanted a single example of all that is wrong in the West's treatment of so-called 'exotic', 'alien' cultures, then *Baraka* is it. The film attempts to construct a stage on which to parade the sheer diversity of life on this planet, but only succeeds in reducing this diversity to a meaningless equilibrium. All the viewer is directed to do is gasp at the enormous vastness of it all, and the power of the technology which brings it to our senses. In fact everything is contained, sealed and delineated within this technology. Devastating poverty is made foreign, exotic and, by the play of light and texture and the position of the lens, even erotic. On the soundtrack, the outdoor ambience of nature, traffic and children are enclosed within reverberating digital spaces, as is Michael Stern's anonymous, lowest common denominator 'World Music'.

Desensitised and deodorised, everything in the film is put through the same processing, selected only on the basis that it can be made to appear gigantic and cinematically beautiful. Nothing is allowed its own voice — even the corpses burning on the Ganges are washed by consonant, synthesized chords.

This sense of distance makes all kinds of pseudo experiences possible. I can stare straight into the eyes of a Thai prostitute, or into the faces of Indian women and children sifting through a rubbish to find their next meal. I can stare at the feet of the homeless asleep in cardboard boxes, eavesdrop on the 'private' suffering of a Tokyo businessman wringing sweat from stressed features with a handkerchief, or watch impassively as the camera pans across piles of shoes at the Nazi death camp at Dachau, to the accompaniment of a crying baby.



Butoh dancer

The camera moves inexorably from Iran to Nepal, Brazil, Cambodia, Kuwait, and between monkeys, birds, volcanoes and every shade of human skin. But Fricke is not concerned with attempting any understanding of the humanity whose images and sounds he exploits, nor in questioning the distorted view we in the West might already have of these subjects. Instead, his film is insufferably self-regarding. Its only function is to serve as a buttress for the West's vast cultural, economic and technical dominion. The unreadable faces of the weak, the exploited, the 'alien', that stare blankly from the screen, and the sounds which accompany them, become little more than surfaces to reflect this power. It's an approach that has obvious parallels in the increasing use of non-Western, 'ethnic' music and imagery to sell Ford cars, Benetton clothing, alcoholic and soft drinks, airline tickets, computers, and so on and so on.

Instead of conveying the richness of all the many histories, meanings, projections and representations possible in this world, such media events send out a set of flattened and filtered images, reducing global culture to a single monochromatic consumable surface. It's a process which, perforce, strips everything of meaning, and makes everything equivalent — from Dachau to didgeridos to whirling dervishes — in order to divert attention from an underlying ideology driven by exploitation, consumption and detachment. The most terrifying thought is that, feigning interest, we could soak up every sound and sight, every beauty and mystery, every wisdom, knowledge and agony the world has to offer, and never see or hear anything we don't already know.

The music and culture of indigenous and minority peoples should never be ghettoised into a hallowed, untouchable space beyond comment, representation or critical discussion. On the contrary, whether we like it or not they are now an irreducible part of our own culture, and deference (usually stemming from ignorance, which films like *Baraka* do nothing to dispel) is the most patronising and cowardly response the contemporary critic can make (sadly, it is still the most common). But must we also subscribe to the kind of ethnic fantasies peddled by *Baraka*, the advertising consultancies, major label marketing divisions, Benetton, Real World, The Body Shop, *The Clothes Show*, where all distinctions lose their meaning, where everything is one, compatible without any reference to the complex interaction and negotiation that must always take place between real cultures outside of the media's virtual reality? Leveling the icons of far flung societies and peoples into identical consumer units creates a facade of democratic cultural dialogue, which merely disguises the murderous institutional monologue of the powerful. □

Baraka is released on video this month by Curzon Video



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voice of america



Harry Partch worked as a dish washer and labourer, lived as a hobo and wrote some of the greatest American music of the century. Since his death in 1975 his work has been forgotten and neglected. Now that's all about to change. Joel Lewis reports from New York

The residents of Brooklyn Heights, New York, take pride in the community's literary and intellectual tradition. Walt Whitman grew up on Cranberry Street. Arthur Miller wrote *Death Of A Salesman* at 31 Grace Court. And, for a short time in the 1940s, Gypsy Rose Lee, Paul and Jane Bowles, Carson McCullers and WH Auden lived in a boarding house at 7 Middagh Street. Auden, according to one story, used to sit at the head of the house's dinner table and announce the nightly menu: "We have a roast, two veg, a salad and a savoury. There will be no political discussion."

The arrival in Brooklyn in March of the music and instruments of Harry Partch, as part of a series of music and performance art concerts at St Ann's Church on Clinton Street, made for a wonderfully out of time experience. St Ann's was the church that Whitman's family attended. On stage were Partch's amazing and beautiful 'home made'

instruments — so striking that they have been exhibited in museums as art works. Bearing names such as 'Chromelodeon', 'Diamond Mamba' and 'Cloud Chamber Bowls', they were created by Partch in order to realise his unique, 43 tones to the octave, microtonal music.

Partch once described himself on a Guggenheim Foundation application: "If my personal history were to be frozen in space, it would appear as a finely detailed mosaic made up of an incredible number of dirty dishes, nameless faces in WPA jobs and almost nameless faces in hobo jungles." Despite this rather desultory description, Partch is one of the most important and least known of American composers. "He was one of the greatest composers of this century and his works [make up] the most challenging and rewarding body of music in the 20th century repertoire," claims Dean Drummond, composer, percussionist and leader of Newband, the chamber group that presented the evening of Partch's music at St Ann's. As a young musician, Drummond worked with Partch on the two albums of the composer's music recorded for CBS Masterworks in the late 60s and early 70s. "He was absolutely one of the most brilliant musical minds I have ever encountered and was very demanding when it came to the performance of his music. He could be very difficult, but he could also be a very sweet individual," says Drummond. "But he was shunned by his contemporaries. In my college days, things were almost absolutely split between the Stravinskians and the Schoenbergians. Partch did not fit into either camp's 'rules' and, thus, he was snubbed by the academics all his life."

Partch was born in 1901 and grew up near Tombstone, Arizona. Essentially a self taught musician and composer, he played piano and organ in local theatres accompanying silent films, and began composing in the conventional manner aged 14.

In 1929, in a room in New Orleans, Partch burned 14 years' worth of compositions in a pot belly stove and started his ansic life anew. He found a new basis for his music in the multitudes that float around in the spaces between the 12 notes that make up the standard octave. He spent the bulk of the great Depression living as a hobo and working out his microtonal theories of music. It was also in the 30s that he began creating instruments which would be capable of realising performances of his unique compositions. Of his influences he once listed "Yagu Indians, Chinese lullabies, Hebrew chants for the dead, Christian hymns, Congo puberty rituals, the Chinese music hall, lumber yards, junk shops and *Bons Godunov*."

His theory of music is outlined in *Genesis Of A Music* (Da Capo Press, 1974). One of his major impulses was the creation of a corporeal music which attempted to return music back to its ritual and social origins. Large pieces such as *The Bewitched* (1955) and *Delusion Of Fury* (1963-69) call for the musicians to be dressed in costume and might also involve singers, mimes and dancers. It has been claimed that his interest in microtonal music was less influenced by Asian music systems than the desire to capture accurately the nuances of American speech. This desire was certainly evident in Newband's St Ann's performance of *US Highball: A Musical Account Of A Transcontinental Hobo Trip* (1943). With the ensemble wearing the tattered jackets and dirt smeared faces associated with the hobo's life, the church ambience was transported back to a hobo camp sometime in the mid-30s. I have rarely heard composed music so direct and so lacking in artifice.

From the 40s until his death in 1975, Partch received enough financial support to live modestly, build new instruments and to stage occasional performances of his work. Many of his recordings were issued on his private Gate 5 label. Despite his vision of an all encompassing American music that would reach out to a large public, the nature of the music set up serious barriers to its dissemination. Learning Partch's music is difficult and takes much more rehearsal time

than the average contemporary piece. "Nothing prepares musicians to play Partch's string instruments," says Drummond. "It is extremely challenging." Also, most of Partch's instruments are one of a kind, and, since his death, the executor of his estate has consistently refused to loan them out for performance.

Recently, however, Newband received the entire Partch collection on permanent loan after their acclaimed performance of *The Wayward* at the 1991 Bang On A Can festival. A grant from the Mellon Foundation has allowed the group to replicate several Partch instruments and to continue restoring and maintaining the entire collection. Drummond notes that several of the nearly 50 year old instruments have never been rewired and that other instruments are too fragile to be used in performance.

Drummond plans to perform and record the total body of Partch's music, including his demanding, evening long "total theatre pieces". Partch's supporters, and Partch himself, often worried about the fate of his music after the composer was no longer alive to teach musicians how to perform and play his work. It appears that Dean Drummond and Newband have taken the first step in assuring that this remarkable music will be heard by a new generation of ears. □

Partch on disc

The two discs that Partch recorded, *The World Of Harry Partch* and *Delusion Of Fury* are unfortunately no longer available. The latter recording is of particular interest because it contains a bonus disc of Partch demonstrating his instruments and talking about his musical philosophy. Two of his CRI recordings have been transferred onto CD. *The Bewitched* is taken from the original Gate 5 recordings, *Music By Harry Partch* is a miscellany of Gate 5 recordings made in the 50s. Partch shares half a CD of a New World recording entitled *Music Of John Cage And Harry Partch*. Most of the tracks are short pieces of Partch performing his settings for poems that were made in the late 40s and early 50s. A recent recording of *Revelation In The Court House* (Tomato) is rather disappointing — the ensemble sounds uncomfortable and under rehearsed. Newband have recorded *Two Studies On Ancient Greek Scales for Mode* (Mode 18), which features microtonal works by Cage, Joan LaBarbara and Drummond. A Newband recording of Partch's *Daphne Of The Dunes* will be released on Mode later this year.



Wshh

j u k e b o x

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of...



June Tabor's singing career began in the late 60s, but her recorded output was restricted to a few guest appearances until 1976 when her first solo album, *Ars And Graces*, and the Silly Sisters collaboration with Maddy Prior were released. Since then she has become, in popular parlance, "the first lady of English folk". Her versatility in a wide repertoire has made her one of the foremost interpretative singers of her time. As well as traditional material, she has covered songs by writers as diverse as Lou Reed, Eric Bogie, Shane MacGowan and Richard Thompson. She also recorded an album of jazz standards, *Some Other Time*, in 1989. Just as her career as a librarian prevented her from devoting all her time to music in the 70s, so a spell as a restaurateur meant a hiatus between 1983 and 88. Her recordings since her return to music have enhanced her reputation. Critical praise has been lavished on them, not least by Elvis Costello — he wrote "All This Useless Beauty" for her (on the album *Angel Tiger*) and threw down the gauntlet to would-be detractors with the quote, "If you can't appreciate June Tabor, you should just stop listening to music." June Tabor's most recent release is the career-spanning *Anthology* (Cooking Vinyl). She has recently played at the Passchendaele Festival in France and is currently recording a new album.

MARTA SEBESTYEN

"Vetettém Violát (I Planted A Violet)" from *Musikszas* (Hannibal)

Marta Sebestyen. Her voice is just so distinctive. I've seen her live several times.

What do you think of her vocal style?
Breathtaking, utterly mesmerising. And this is where someone who's truly a great singer really shows their power, because I can't understand a word of what she's singing about and I'm a person who really goes for words first and foremost. But it's just those little twists and turns in the voice, the subtlety in her singing. There's no one like her for singing in this manner because it's much softer than the Bulgarian style. It's a completely different approach to this music. Hungarian singers do seem to have this wonderful way of floating the notes.

There seems to have been a marked upsurge in interest in Eastern European music over the last six years or so.

The interest has always been there. I've been listening to Bulgarian music for 25 years and Hungarian music for about ten or 12 years. It's the availability that's changed, when you're getting good quality recordings like this instead of hard to get, not terribly good pressings of stuff on vinyl only through specialist shops. The real key to it was *Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares* and once that got on a CD people started saying "Hey, there's some really good things going on in Eastern Europe." It's just people weren't aware of them generally.

ULTRAMARINE

"Kingdom" from *United Kingdoms* (blanco y negro)

I think they're obscuring what might be an interesting lyric with what sounds like the Clangers trying to make a pop record. Haven't got a clue what it is.

The band's called Ultramarine, with Robert Wyatt guesting on vocals, and it's a reworking of "The Song Of The Lower Classes", an old Chartist song.

Ah, that's interesting. I was right about it being an interesting lyric, though.

The band are dubbed "pastoral techno". Do you think it works as a merging of styles?

I think it's a complete mess, personally. That's actually quite a powerful lyric delivered in such a slack-jawed way as to be completely contradictory. [Adopts boring drone] "Let's all have a resolution." And then you put all this nonsense over the top. Oh dear, whoever of the Chartist movement wrote that ought to be turning in his grave.

It was Ernest Jones, circa 1848.

I think I'd rather have heard it the way it was written originally. I know Robert Wyatt's very interested in all forms of folk music — I just think it's rather a waste of intelligence and energy.

THE POGUES

"Sally McLennane" from *Rum, Sodomy And The Lash* (Stiff)

The Pogues. [She bursts out laughing at the line, "Some people left for heaven without warning." It's this wonderful, infectious... mayhem I think is the best way to describe it. And wonderful lyrics, though you have to strain to catch them all. Some people say that The Pogues, especially Shane MacGowan, have ruined Irish music.

Nonsense! You'll never ruin Irish music. It's too strong. It has so many manifestations. This is wonderful because it's an archaic in its approach to Irish music, but the lyrics are so good that you can't help but enter into the spirit of it.

You've covered some of MacGowan's songs.

I've covered one, "Lullaby Of London", on The Oyster Band album [a 1990 collaboration, *Freedom And Ram*]. I love his writing. When it comes down to song choice, it's a totally subjective thing and I just don't think that I've come across anything else that I feel personally would benefit from. His choice of words is so apposite and he really knows how to turn a phrase and make you sit bolt upright and think "Bloody hell!" He's a truly great writer.

He writes songs that sound in first hearing like classics that you've heard before.

Well, that's the skill in it because they're taking those elements — particularly in the power of the lyrics — and creating something totally new.

You're known as an interpretative singer; are you likely to write any of your own material?

No, it's not in me. There's an awful lot

of people who seem to think it is. There's an inability in us all to stand back and be objectively critical of our own work. And that happens with songwriters.

DIAMANDA GALAS

"Let My People Go" from *The Singer* (Hute)

Nina Simone? No.

She's going in that direction on this track but it's Diamanda Galas from New York. This is an album of covers of blues songs and spirituals, but her material is usually far more experimental. Have you heard of her?

No, never. It doesn't do anything for me. I'm afraid I find it a little too exaggerated. It's almost where technique takes over. I could be wrong and there's a genuine feeling prodding her into that whole style of singing, but I don't move me. I don't find it particularly attractive way of singing either. It's all very much on the same level, there's no light or shade or contrasts or whatever which can be enervating — it loses some of its impact.

Do you think that she's being insincere?

I don't think she's being insincere. I don't think that would be a fair criticism of anyone who sings in that very elaborate emotional style. A lot of it is technique and if that's the path you choose to follow, if you think that's appropriate to the music, well fine. (Looks at the CD track listing.) There's some real stand-out stuff here of a great nature of song. If you hear some of the old black guys singing it, with them it seems to come from the heart and not the head. It's a very different matter. You're listening, in some ways, to a lot of the same vocal tricks, but to them it has some real significance.

DINAH WASHINGTON

"That Old Feeling" from *In Love* (Roulette)

I'm bound to get this wrong. It's not Billie Holiday isn't it? [Quickly.] No! It's one of those messing about with the notes things... but the instrumentation's different. It's very Nelson Riddle-ish, like the great Sinatra recordings. Who is it?

The orchestration's by Don Costa. It's Dinah Washington.

Is it? I would have got there in the end or I may have got there fairly smartly

but I didn't actually know. But it's great timing. Oh, oh yes! I mean just the whole delivery. I love that style of doing standards, the arrangements are very lush. It's not something I'd do, but I love listening to it because it's so slick. It's a way of approaching a lyric and your just sort of hanging there, waiting on the next note to see where she's going to go. It's the sort of thing that was played on the radio when I was a child, so that's where I would have come across her.

The great female singers of that period, Sarah Vaughan for instance, were magnificent singers. It wasn't the kind of music that I was drawn to at the time at the age of 12 or whatever. It's only lately that I've come to appreciate how fine their approach to the music was, because I'm a real late starter on all sorts of things, you know, which includes jazz, which I don't have any sympathy for at that age.

You had a go at the style on the *Some Other Time* album.

Yes, but deliberately didn't listen to anybody when I did that. That was the whole point of doing the album of jazz standards — to come to those songs as me, not me trying to pretend I was a jazz singer, which I'm not, but to approach the songs from my very own meagre musical background and interpret the lyrics in my own fashion, not as someone steeped in the jazz repertoire would have done. If you just end up copying someone else, that's certainly a way of learning, but not the way I'd like to approach the songs.

FAIRPORT CONVENTION

"Suzanne" from *Heyday* (Hannibal)

The Byrds?

You'll recognise it when the other singer comes in.

I've heard it before, but... Sandy [Denny]. Yes, it's Fairport. Is that Ian [Matthews]?

It's a Leonard Cohen song recorded for *John Peel's Top Gear* radio show in 1968.

Judy Collins did a superb version of this. I like it. I sang in a band at college — we did Fairport covers and Jefferson Airplane and that kind of thing. We used to finish with "Piece Of My Heart" every night but the screaming got to me in the end — we didn't have a very good PA. I saw

Fairport in 67 or 68 — they were utterly brilliant.

What about Sandy Denny as a vocalist?

In a class of her own. She could just introduce that edge into her voice. It can be very sweet, then it can really cut through everything and make you sit bolt upright. And again her phrasing was quite remarkable and unique. Nobody ever quite phrased things the way Sandy did and that makes you sit back and listen because she highlights the words very strongly — so it's back to words again.

Fairport's music was quite innovative and experimental at the time, but I think some later examples of folk rock are too self-consciously rolisterous and rollicking.

This vintage of Fairport has no parallel, really, in their whole approach to music and choice of songs. But if you're the starters or instigators of any sort of movement then you have so much leeway to do what you want because no one's done it before. The whole remembrance of freshness we have when remembering this vintage of Fairport, anyone coming after is bound to suffer from comparison. But there was nothing like it.

There are some aspects of [folk rock] I find exceptionally exciting. The Oysters particularly, because the words are so damn good. And the whole energy and excitement of the performance incorporating 'real' instruments — the fiddle, the melodeon, cello and putting that in front of a driving back line — that's really quite something. What Fairport were doing was quite different in those early days. It was all new and you could do what the hell you liked and they had so many ideas. Then things got stale I suppose, and the ideas no longer appeal as easily as they might.

MAZZY STAR

"Five String Serenade" from *So Tonight That I Might See* (Capitol)

I've no idea who it is.

The band are called Mazy Star. The singer, Hope Sandoval, said that she'd rather be at home listening to June Tabor than performing on stage. They're rather reclusive. Oh, that's nice. Thank you. It's quite Californian.

They're based in LA and the song's a

cover, written by Arthur Lee.

It's got this sort of 'I've just had a vast amount of noxious substances and I'm going to attempt to sing' quality. I don't mean that unkindly, because it's got a kind of wistful charm about it in a strange kind of way. It's very laid back — it's a bit witty. I find this rather slack, jawed approach to singing a little difficult. It's very common — it's a style of singing that I don't find very appealing. It's really treating the voice more as an extra bit of synth than delivering the words, but that's fine, it's just not the way I'd go about it.

SHEILA CHANDRA

"A Sailor's Life" from *The Zen Kiss* (Real World)

Not English? Not American? Not English-speaking?

Well...

Yes and no — don't go any further than that, does it?

No, she's Anglo-Asian.

Oh yes, it's Sheila Chandra. I've not heard her sing this before. I've heard her sing "Donal Og" on *Ancestors' Voices*. It's an Irish song, then it goes into araga type thing. I really like that, like what I've heard of her singing before. She copes so well a style of singing that is not her own because Asian singers are so good at singing half tones and quarter tones and eighth tones that she can do it very naturally and very well. I love the timbre of her voice and the way it floats. It was pretty much a straight copy of the way that Sandy sung it, but none the worse for that by any means. A lovely piece of singing.

There are some remarkable similarities in approaches to folk music from around the world.

Yes there can be. If you hear Marta sing something in Irish, she's got that wonderful fluid way of coping with the grace notes, very similar to someone like Dolores Keane, for example. There are some great Irish women singers. Mary Black, Maura O'Connell — she's still a great singer but now she sings more FIOR kind of things. They have this wonderful way of approaching a decorated piece of singing. You can't actually pick out the individual notes, but it's like water flowing all the way around you. Well, Sheila Chandra has that ability but she can do many other things as well as singing in that distinctly Asian style too. □

Miles Davis never had much to do with the movies (although he did get a cameo role on *Miami Vice* once, playing a pimp, predictably) but the one film he did score, *Lift To The Scaffold*, is a suitably tortured and dark piece of work. It was Louis Malle's debut feature, shot when he was 24 and released in 1957, before the French New Wave had got its name.

In fact there's a case for saying that the movie was the first to anticipate the mythology of the Vietnam war that emerged in 70s American cinema. In 1957, Vietnam was still called Indo-China, and although the dirty, colonial conflict the French were engaged in there didn't get the worldwide attention which America's subsequent intervention brought, plenty of Frenchmen returned home exhibiting the tics and trauma that would later turn the Viet vet into a movie cliché.

The plot revolves around two prototype Travis Bickles: Maurice Ronet, who murders his arms-dealing boss (the husband of his lover Jeanne Moreau), and Georges Poujouly, a confused young man who guns down two German tourists. Their crimes become entangled so that Ronet may go to the gallows for the wrong killing. It's a somewhat implausible scenario that gains its power from a combination of elements drawn from American B movie noir classics like *Gun Crazy* and *Double Indemnity*, as well as the casual excellence of the Davis score.

Davis and the accompanying French musicians famously improvised most of the music while watching a screening of the film, and the music adds a depth and resonance to the dramas taking place on screen that Malle's moody film making couldn't equal. There are too many shots of a lovelorn

In this month's video section, David Eimer reviews Miles Davis soundtracking Louis Malle, River Phoenix in Nashville, some vintage surrealism, and Ry Cooder in the desert



Moreau wandering aimlessly through Paris at night and the split story means that neither Ronet nor Poujouly get the chance to explore their characters fully.

It's hard to understand why Davis didn't work on more films: his priceless ability to suggest mood and nuance through a single note or phrase made his music perfect for the medium. As *Lift To The Scaffold* is the only example of that understanding, it's invaluable.

Considering the amount of press generated by the untimely death of River Phoenix, it seems curious that

The Thing Called Love, the last film he completed, should go straight to video in the UK. Once you see the movie though, all becomes clear: it's not very good. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich (once a name to reckon with), it follows a trio of aspiring Country and Western singers as they struggle to make it in Nashville. Against a backdrop of Johnny Cash tunes and good of boy accents, Phoenix, Samantha Mathis and Dermot Mulroney argue, fall in love and take it in turns to demonstrate their lack of musical talent.

It's also rather parochial, one of the problems with Country and Western is the different way it's perceived outside the US. In America it's folk music, heritage, mythology, here it's cowboy boots and Tammy Wynette. The movie sticks to clichés anyway. There's always a convenient A&R man around when the stars jump up to sing, while new songs are written after flashes of inspiration that are almost visible. Phoenix's performance is as flat as his vocals and only his most committed admirers should contemplate renting this one.

Luis Buñuel was so scared of the audience's potentially violent reaction to the first screening of his *Un Chien Andalou* that he armed himself with rocks and hid behind the screen at the premiere. He was perhaps excessively paranoid, but it's hard now to over estimate the shock that this 17 minute collaboration with Salvador Dalí caused on its debut in 1929. That's not because of the subject-matter, essentially the film is about the gap between the sexes, with Pierre Batcheff and Simone Mareuil running through a series of arguments and demonstrations of raw passion. Rather it's the way

Buñuel and Dalí constructed the film and packed it with unsettling imagery, from the famous opening sequence of a man stropping a razor and then using it to slice open a woman's eyeball (while a crazed, Argentinian tango hammers away in the background), to the ants emerging from Batcheff's palm while a donkey's head suppurates over a piano. Buñuel and Dalí were out to wind people up, even if the surrealist tag gave them a viable artistic excuse.

More interesting than those still-potent images was the way Buñuel cut up the time frame so that it jumped back and forwards, making rational plot exposition redundant. Along with the rapid location shifts, it gave the film an illusory incoherence that either alienated or frustrated viewers. Buñuel further emphasised this dissonance with the incongruous soundtrack, which alternates between Wagner's *Tristan Und Isolde* and more tangos. These original choices prove much more effective than the portentous and conventional Maurice Kagel composition for strings that accompanies the Swiss print of the film (and which reminds me of the Jews theme). Both versions are on the new *Connoisseur* release.

Connoisseur are also putting out Wim Wenders's *Pans, Texas*, with its iconic and massively influential Ry Cooder soundtrack. As a movie it's over praised, especially when compared to Wenders's 1976 masterpiece *Kings Of The Road*. But that desert guitar still resonates. Buy the CD. □

Lift To The Scaffold is out now on *Electric Video*. *The Thing Called Love* is released through *CIC Video*. *Un Chien Andalou* and *Pans, Texas* are out now on *Connoisseur Video*.

Sheila Chandra **The Zen Kiss**
Real World CDRW45

She's riding on the first Asian/Euro pop fusion record (Monie Love's "Ever So Lonely"), now she returns with another globe-winning duet of self-penned songs and music from ethnic cultures (brassy, raucous tabla-babble, Abbess Hildyard of Bingen's

feverish medieval visions). As much a personal odyssey towards the distant limits of her own musical imagination as a mere exercise in cross-cultural connection.



MASSIVE LOCAL
GOING GLOBAL!

"With the hand near her forehead and her quirky old leather jacket, she brought something together that wasn't simply noise and swing and borrowed throat."
Honey Glass, *The Wire* 115

WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD

Various Artists **Plus From Us**
Real World CDRW33



Ashkhabad **City of Love**
Real World CDRW34



Shirley **Voices from the Distant Steppe**
Real World CDRW41



Travis **Native Root** **Djambite**
Real World CDRW43



The Last Prophet
Real World CDRW44



Arab Dada **El Mana Kuoyo**
Real World CDRW42

SPRING
COLLECTION!

The Wire presents
the Real World
1994
Spring Collection!

REALWORLD

The Zen Kiss: "It's not a reference to Zen as an orthodox belief, but as a beautiful force moving through me, like a kiss" Sheila Chandra

Print run

Dr John: Under A Hoodoo Moon
By Dr John (Mac Rebennack)
with John Rummel
ST MARTIN'S PRESS (Hbk £19.95)

At his best, Dr John (who does and doesn't necessarily share the same body as Mac Rebennack) was a kind of rhythm 'n' voodoo Sun Ra. Throughout his career he has used a cloak of carnival guises to emphasise and sometimes baffle a serious and seriously seductive juggling with R&B texture and tradition. His early, otherworldly sorties (songs like "Walk On Gilded Splinters", "Gris Gris Gumbo Ya Ya", "Loup Garou") sound like musical transparencies — grey, grainy, half there, a musical incense that sounds spooked by its own presence.

As muso autobiographies go, *Under A Hoodoo Moon* is several parallel worlds better than the norm, and it is required reading for non-worshippers at the cult of the Night Tripper, too. Unlike too many tellers of similar tales (the erratic career, the neglected innovator), Rebennack is refreshingly free of rancour. In fact, he is generous to a fault: he rarely attributes any success or breakthrough idea solely to himself, but rather to general New Orleans circumstance and tradition.

Rebennack sees himself as a musician (R&B, jazz, session man, musicalological curator) rather than A Rock Star. One of the delights of the book — parallel to the belated exposure and kudos he gives to a whole army of New Orleans musicians — is his contempt for the rock people he meets along the way. These are the only people he seems to begrudge anything. He may have benefited by hitching his own hoodoo circus to the greater rock circus of the 60s and 70s, but

In this month's books section: Dr John comes clean, John Lydon and Ice-T mouth off, and Duke Ellington gets analysed

he reserves the right to be unconvinced by the likes of Keith Moon, The Allman Brothers and The Rolling Stones.

You can virtually get a contact high/low from reading *Hoodoo Moon*, so steeped in narcotics are the dramatic personae. Hard drug dalliance, it seems, was as prevalent in 40s/50s New Orleans as stride piano lines. He is convincingly sane about his own drug addiction (he only recently conquered a 35 year affair with smack), and it is sweet relief to read something on the rock 'n' roll-drugs equation which comes completely clean (so to speak), too often the counter culture is guilty of setting up a discourse of furtive bunk and mythic 'glamour' in parallel to the Right's irrational demonisation of the subject. Throughout he refers to himself and his 'junko partners' as 'dope fiends', rather than dragging in some obscuring, post-therapy jargon. His perspective (not to mention memory) is astonishing for

a man who is a self-confessed walking pin cushion. There is no bleating, no beginning for extenuating circumstances to be dragged in to explain his addiction. He did his drugs and he did his work. It's that simple, and that's how he (compellingly) tells it.

Hoodoo Moon is also a valuable, all-encompassing picture of early R&B life, and a great social, architectural, criminological and musical history of New Orleans (it does for that berg what Stanley Booth did for Memphis in *Rhythm Or*). He runs down a vivid roll call of various low life characters, and in the process shows that he wasn't alone or unique, that everything about him (his drug taking, musical orientation, voodoo education and affiliation) was inevitable, not in any way out of the ordinary or this world. *Under A Hoodoo Moon* goes some way towards suggesting that his Dr John persona isn't in any way a 'fake' — or that, if it is, it's a genuine one.

IAN PENMAN

Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs
John Lydon with Keith and Kent Zimmerman
HODDER & STOUGHTON (Hbk £14.99)

Just like those first few P45 LPs, the ex-Pistol's autobiography is far better than you feel you had a right to expect. It isn't perfect, but it's often very funny, and occasionally even moving. It's sometimes rambling, occasionally repetitious, a not always well edited transcript of tapes (dictated to the otherwise mysterious Zimmerman brothers, I assume), intercut with interviews from a bizarre but illuminating group of inner circle punks and journalists, with all contradictions and insults left in. In fact, it reads like him: smart, perverse, self-

centred, suspicious, one of a kind.

You don't learn much you didn't know already, if you've been paying attention: give or take the emphasis or interpretation of a couple of episodes, little's broached which Jon Savage didn't cover in *England's Dreaming*. The story isn't even taken as far as *Metal Box* — a very astute move, in so far as this record revealed, at the time, a much more complex Lydon to the one usually on show, while the group that recorded it later collapsed in acrimonious circumstances which reflect rather brutally on Lydon's own character flaws. Perhaps he's leaving it all for volume two.

Lydon's contribution to music is hard to pin down — certainly it's more than just a gift for picking sidemen. (As he points out, if Glen Matlock was responsible for all The Pistols' tunes, what happened to this talent thereafter?) He enjoys admitting he can't sing, that though he knows music well (and minds about it), his tastes run to the chaotic, that the Pistols under his sole control would have been unlistenable. "If I can remember how to make the same noise twice, then that is my music." In fact, he's unexpectedly committed to the notion that groups are collectively creative, that the value of the Pistols was the volatility of the disparate elements they brought together. (He breaks off at one point to lecture writers for being too 'socio' in outlook to grasp this.)

"Culture is a hokey fraud. We're near the 21st century — who needs it any more? Culture is merely rules, and it goes hand in toe with soppy religious stupidity," he says, early on. His gift was to persuade otherwise unexceptional people to make music, as if they agreed with him on this, to focus on things that usually get thrown

out in the name of culture, or taste, or mere entertainment, to transcend themselves, to refuse to do what you assume you're meant to be doing. To force you, for a while, to question your own life, motives, future.

"The truth is always mediocre," he says. I'd forgotten how much I loved him. I wish he'd come back for real, and make us have fun questioning our own motives, just like we did when we were kids.

MARK SINKER

The Ice Opinion

By Ice-T with Heidi Sigmund

PAN (PBK \$9.99)

Entertainers, among whose ranks rap artist Ice-T happily places himself, are often asked questions they are not particularly qualified to answer. The New World Order, the environment, the homeless... it has become part of their job to offer their views. With rappers who target society's ills in their music, such questions can at least seem more relevant than they usually do.

Ice-T once told me in an interview that he receives many requests from organisations who want him to play the role model, because of his status as an ex-con from South Central (a past he often talks about). He likes the idea that his 'escape' is seen by some as exemplary (getting out of crime and into rhyme) but his main concern when asked by groups to wave their flag is not to talk down to those among whom he used to live. This helps explain his book's subtitle, "Who Gives A Fuck?", designed (Ice-T explains) to stop readers taking his thoughts as the "word of God". And each chapter — divided into subjects, such as 'Crime And Punishment', 'Men, Women And Sex', 'Racism' — ends with the quaint disclaimer "That's my opinion, who gives a fuck?"

Ice-T's opinions are most interesting when they come out of distinct experience or are based on expertise. The chapter on rap — or the Art Of Sht Talkin' — addresses the bravado of the performance, the exaggeration of the scenarios, and some of the more contentious bits of diction in an extract which nicely captures the scholarly funkster persona he maintains

throughout the book, he says, "The word 'bitch' from the ghetto perspective is a non-gender specific slang term for anybody who thinks the world revolves around them." Scholarly, and a touch disingenuous.

His analysis of censorship and the Christian right is sharp: they have a problem with life, he reckons, life for them is pornographic, X-rated. Elsewhere he has some unusual, if plausible, theories on sex and relationships, for which he even devises a Relationship Meter. He recounts disagreements with Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, and offers the Urban Capitalist Guerrilla as a positive model. If Ice-T's views on making it sometimes seem to boil down to making sure you grab a piece of the pie, the UCG model represents something of an alternative — grab the pie but carry on telling it like it is.

ROBERT YATES

The Duke Ellington Reader

Ed by Mark Tucker

OUP (HBK \$19.95)

Duke Ellington remained sceptical of critical discussion of his music. In "The Hot Bach", a 1944 profile in *The New Yorker*, he avers that "such talk stinks up the place". Despite this, Mark Tucker, author of *Ellington: The Early Years*, and editor of this comprehensive collection of writings on the composer, is undeterred. As well as interviews with and articles by Duke, Tucker includes contemporary critical comment. RD Darrell's amazingly prescient "Black Beauty" (1932), the first significant appraisal of Ellington, is reproduced in full. Like his fellow 'senior critics', Darrell laughed at the "instrumental wa-wang and gargling and gobbling" of "Black And Tan Fantasy", but came to recognise that "beneath all its oddity and perverseness there was a twisted beauty that grew on me more and more". Also included is André Hodeir's groundbreaking analysis of "Concerto For Coote", and some fascinating detail on Duke's method of composing from HA Overstreet and record producer Irving Townsend.

About himself, Duke was always

clear: "I don't write jazz. I write Negro folk music." We are, in the final analysis, the only serious exponents of Negro music." Comparison with Debussy was often made — at a time when that composer's stock was high — but Duke wasn't fazed: "Some people mix up the words serious and classical." And again: "To attempt to elevate the status of the jazz musician by forcing comparisons with classical music is to deny him his rightful share of originality."

But is it 'elevation' or isn't it? The most hotly contested issue here is Ellington's aversion to extended forms. Robert Crowley and Max Harrison slug this one out in print with Brian Priestley. Harrison's article, "Ellington's Longer Works", revised for this volume, suggests that Duke was "one who might have become one of our century's greatest composers but who instead persisted in leading a band." Articles by Richard Boyer and Pete Welding bear out the grind of one nighters, trans, buses and lack of sleep this involved. Why did he carry on doing it? "My reward is hearing what I've done, and unlike most composers, I can hear it immediately. That's why I keep these expensive gentlemen with me."

Duke's persona is ever present. His band speculate on this still centre: "His pulse is so low he can't get excited. His heart beat [sic] slower than an ordinary man's." Pieces on key Ellingtonians conclude the volume. Johnny Hodges is expansive when a classical conductor asks about his saxophone artistry: "I just lucked up on it, Bubber, I just lucked up on it."

There are hilarious moments too. Duke assures the man from Scotland's *Sunday Post* that "there is a definite relationship between the rhythm of reels and the Highland fling and the music I play." And he rejects research showing that 'hot' music causes 'debased emotions'; apparently, in a test carried out at the time, a young couple remained formal while listening to some classical recordings but "became familiar and more personal toward one another" when the swing music started.

ANDY HAMILTON



SOUL c h e c k

May winners:

Bergman and Parker,
Allan Hovhaness, Nusrat
Fateh Ali Khan, Moonshake

In soundcheck:

AMM, Beastie Boys, John
Cale, Company, Etoile De
Dakar, Dr. John, Taj Mahal,
Herbie Hancock, Kristin
Hersh, Roland Kirk, Last
Poets, Bill Frisell, Van
Morrison, Plastikman,
Rollins Band, Sonic Youth,
Stockhausen, Cecil Taylor,
Jah Wobble and more...

In brief:

Kodwo Eshun has deep
thoughts about club
culture; David Ilic
improvises some words
about noise

In outline:

Rob Young composes
himself in the classical
arena



PHOTO: LAMONT

WIRE WINNER

higher planes drifts

**Borah Bergman & Evan
Parker**
The Fire Tale
SOUL NOTE 121252 CD

If Evan Parker's duets with Anthony
Braxton on *Leo's Duo* (London/
1993) lulled you into thinking that he
had melted into a latter-day
Warne Marsh abstractionist, then
dream on.

The title piece of *The Fire Tale* is a

fearsome collaboration, with Parker
at his most compressed and exact,
and pianist Bergman playing savage
lines like the horn player he once
was. "The Fire Tale" relates to a
comment by the pianist's father
about the creative spark, its survival
and extinction. In freely disposed
parts, it looks at the question from a
multiplicity of directions, reinforcing
the sense of a solid but anomalous
musical object gradually consumed
by the combustion of its own
elements.

"Red Shadows", a composition that
Bergman has recorded before, is

more subdued to begin with, but
evolves into a bleakly lit landscape of
soprano trills and harmonics over
massive left-hand figures. The Cool
School makes an unexpected
appearance on "Ascent: Through The
Vortex", which is intended as a
creative response to Lenne
Tinstano's "Descent into The
Maebstrom". Again, the sheer density
of musical activity is staggering and
it's a tribute to the discipline of
Parker's playing that he hangs on to a
line that, two minutes in, sounds
impossible to sustain, but which still
has impetus 15 minutes later.

I've been sceptical about Parker's
recent solo soprano recitals, feeling
that he'd overworked the seam. On
this showing, though, there's no
doubting his ability to find new things
to say with the straight horn. *The Fire
Tale* dramatically extends the
language he began to encode almost
a decade ago on *Chips* with Steve
Lacy. The association with Bergman
lifts it to a new expressive plane.

BRIAN HORTON

WIRE WINNER

spiritual refines

Allan Hovhaness
**Mountains And Rivers Without
End**

KOCH INTERNATIONAL 37221 CD

Allan Hovhaness (born in 1911) is
simultaneously a marketing man's
dream and nightmare. His hymnal,
reverent and contemplative music
should have elbowed him into
classical music's commercial
stratosphere alongside Pärt, Gorecki
and Tavener, but the weirdness of his
CV — Scottish-Armenian-American
descent, 67 (count 'em)
symphonies, a thematic compocopia
of esoteric mystical baggage that
makes Scriabin look ascetic — has
made him so far unsaleable. Bad
news, that. Hovhaness, for all his
mind boggling obscurantism, is a
highly gifted and potentially popular

composer. Can this lovely collection of chamber orchestra works, glowingly performed by The Manhattan CO, finally hoist his star aloft?

The vehicle for Hovhanness's devout musical spirituality is not minimalist austerity, but a harmonic idiom of intense lushness, with a king's ransom of liturgical, Caucasian and Oriental colorings woven into a seamless sound world. There are dizzying sprouts off the bizarre tone clusters. Carry On trombone glissandos and outstanding effects. But there are also outcrops of touching whimsy such as a delightful toy xylophone and trumpet duet in the middle of the hypnotic *Mountains And Rivers Without End*.

Hovhanness's critical stock fluctuates wildly, for every prostrate apostrophe there is a sworn enemy who loathes his every essence, accusing him of crass tone painting by numbers. It's hard to dispel the notion that Hovhanness is a timewarped romantic at heart, but the beatific idiosyncrasy of his work, with its coupling of Western bourgeois musical expression and non-Western lexicography, is awe inspiring.

The music flirts with but expertly evades vulgarity even in the two lolipopson show here, the *And From Haroutoun* (1948) and *Prayer Of St. Gregory* (1946). It's achingly gorgeous stuff, scored for trumpet and strings and the endlessly unraveling, melismatic melodies (the trumpeter's role is part mazzin, part cantor) have to be heard to be believed.

PAUL STUMP

Further consumer info: labels not named in this column should be obtainable at good specialist stores — or through such sterling distributors as New Note, Harmonia Mundi, Cadillac, Impetus, These...

Soul Note: through Harmonia Mundi

Koch International: through Koch

Tou Pure: through RTH/Pinnacle

A&O, Tanty, Shaka: through Trojan

Pops CDs (Ocora) allow one furtherest into his music's improvisational aspects, while the three Greatest Hits CDs (Sirocco), made up of rougher Pakistani recordings, probably bite the hardest. But it is the three quawwal albums for Real World, *Shahen Shah*, *Shabazz*, and now *The Last Prophet*, that find him at his most innovative, exploring new ideas and untraditional directions, with subtle elements of polyphony and harmony enriching his composing. If this moves his music more easily towards the Western ear, his real genius is that he achieves this without compromising the visceral Indian and Pakistani traditions that provide the basis for his music.

The opening track "Mala Madni" is particularly exceptional, capturing the band in their ecstatic, almost hysterical, essence, chorus after chorus dotted with virtuosic solo vocal flights over endless, bubbling percussion. It's a joyously devotional experience, as instantly possessing as any anemic rock 'n' roll chorus.

RICHARD SCOTT

WIRE WINNER

lunar eclipse

Moonshake
The Sound Your Eyes Can Follow
TOU PURE PURE 33 COM/CLP

With a precedent set by Public Enemy's pioneering use of jazz samples in the 80s, it's a now just short distance from sampling jazz to inverting it — putting sax and trumpets through delay/distortion and the whole armoury of effects boxes hitherto only fully exploited by guitarists. To say that Moonshake owe a direct debt to PE would be an exaggeration — but equally, this astonishing record could only have happened in their wake.

The group's trajectory has moved on from its previous fixations on My Bloody Valentine (on their first EP) and dub (on their LP *Evo Luna*). They've grasped at the potentially psychobelic combination of horns and samples with alacrity, enlisting former Gallon Drunk and current Skree saxophonist Ray Dickey to lead a horn section, expandable to include double bass and trumpet.

Dave Callahan's soul of tune takes

have found their perfect accompaniment in this ghostly shuffle and swing, with new vocalist Melissa Gates and guest singer P.J. Harvey fitting easily into the departed Margaret Fiedler's shoes. Moonshake's new instrumentation also fits well with Callahan's lyrical characters — the kinds of failures and urban flops that Mike Leigh could have written into *Naked*.

Sax and sampler are the quintessential urban instruments, the pens with which urban decay is best delineated, capable of delivering blasts that mimic the intensity of an existence many now experience as something close to an assault, or brushing grains into impressionistic collages that register all the sinister undercurrents plaguing the city. Paradoxically, the spaces where the use of information processing tools like the sampler and MIDI has been most prevalent are also some of the world's least informed areas — think of Detroit, the home of Techno, but whose city hall isn't even computerised.

Not that Brit groups like Moonshake have the edge in the authenticity stakes. Instead, their stories of everyday, skin-of-the-teeth survivalism point to the emergence of the dual city, a London split between its hyper-informed City core and its under-medicated suburbs. *The Sound Your Eyes Can Follow* is just that — a signpost to rarely mapped territories, as well as a benchmark release in a year which already promises so many developments.

JAKUBOWSKI

WIRE WINNER

knowledge

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan
The Last Prophet
REAL WORLD COM/44 CO

Though Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is one of the world's most inspired and technically staggering vocalists, with several hundred hours of recordings already available, yet another Nusrat album might not be on your current must-hear list. Of his massive recorded output, the 200 cassettes of his live recordings and two live in



soundcheck

Alpha & Omega
Safe In The Ark

A&O 94 CO

Dub Funk Association
Raise The Dub

TANTY ENTY 001 CO

Dread And Fred
African Chant: Iron Works Part Three

SHAKA 937 CD

It's ironic that it's the generation reared on loops, breakbeats and fast bleeps that have made the dub revival a reality. Reformatted E-heads and dub types succeeding where righteous rastas failed may sound like blasphemy, but dub has found a new 90s audience who've come in on the back of the Ambient boom, been influenced by the subsonic bass of the best Jungle Techno tunes and who want to take trance one step further.

It's not just been one way traffic though. The current crop of dub producers and musicians have learnt from the technology that facilitated House and Techno, adapting and incorporating it to revitalise their music. The results are some distance from the mighty, spiritual sounds of such 70s heroes as Prince Far-I, Lee Perry and King Tubby. Alpha & Omega represent the best of this new breed of digital dub pioneers. Their seventh album, *Safe In The Ark*, is more successful than most in elaborating on the basic booming bass lines, while also allowing the music the space that is the essence of dub. Light, airy machine drums, restrained vocals and some judicious tweaking of the effects box to create reverberate tracks like "Show Me A Purpose", "It's Alright" and "Blind Us Together" as effective as anything that's come out of this area recently. A&O lift the listener into that rare, sublime state where you're at one with the rhythm.

The less positive aspects of this digital revolution and the cross-pollination it has engendered can be heard on *Raise The Dub*. It's not necessarily a weak album, but producer Kelvin Richards has so cluttered the tunes that the music has no space to breathe. There are too many influences at work here: Jungle on "Ruffist!", Hip-hop on "Dubonic", even a touch of ska. Some people are just too eclectic for their own good.

Dread And Fred's *African Chant* is the latest in veteran UK dub producer DJ Jah Shaka's Ironworks series. For most of the 80s, when it seemed no one else was interested, Shaka gallantly flew the flag for British dub. But *African Chant* is a rather flat piece, way below his best. "War And Crime" and "Rocking Dub" are stand out tracks, but the rest imparts the feeling that everyone



involved is just going through the motions.

DAVID EMER

AMM

To Hear And Back Again

MATCHLESS MRC003

AMM

Generative Themes

MATCHLESS MRC006

AMM

The Inexhaustible Document

MATCHLESS MRC013

The first time I saw AMM in the early 70s, they shared an all night bill at London's Chalk Farm Roundhouse with Cream and Goro Washington's RamJam Band. Perhaps I was the only member of the audience to realise that there was music in progress, because the activities on stage were easily mistaken for technical procedures leading to the real thing.

But this was the real thing: a revelation that has caused me all sorts of grief ever since. As my personal history of AMM is shaped by the Damascus type experience, it may not be useful to you. Yet there was a sensibility at large in their music which could draw in the open hearted listener, back in the days when there were shillings and pence, their Tuesday evenings at The Place were the closest I have ever come to feeling that, as a listener, I was part of an evolutionary process.

The sound they create is a low unto itself, connected to the idiom of improvisation (with a bag) which the group helped to generate. The music can be connected, as the various sleeve notes to these three releases suggest, to theories of physics, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, biology, politics, to histories of music, or to the seemingly unstructured sounds of daily life.

The three CDs here represent various stages of the AMM story. The first is from the period (1973 to 1975) when AMM existed as duo of saxophones Lou Gare and percussionist Eddie Prevost, and for me, the music it contains represents a difficulty. Other than this duo phase, from 1965 to the present with varying personnel, AMM has sounded consistently like AMM. Why?

AMM's music emerges, possessed with strength and surface tension, yet never forced. So there might seem to be a certain diffidence or half heartedness in the work. When circumstances called for more action, then the music changed character. *To Hear And Back Again* is where you hear the brilliance of the musicians, on the other two CDs (from 1982 and 1987 respectively), you can hear the brilliance of AMM. That difference, after so many years, remains enthralling.

DAVID TOOP

The Beastie Boys

Some Old Bullshit

PARLOPHONE 0777 7898 4306 CD/CM/LP

All right, this is a compilation of The Beastie Boys' early singles and the like: "Cookie Puss", "Egg Raid On Mog", some three chord punk, some spaced out dub. Now, you know I am going to have to end the review with 'for fans only' no matter how much effort I put into describing each track, so we might as well admit that we're not fans before it's too late and just ask ourselves, why?

On my part I must say the way The Beasties recovered from their 1987 typecasting as branded sexist white boy rap and managed not only to survive into the PC 90s but even to build some cred as an avant rock posse leaves me baffled and admiring in equal measure. Reading those old interviews, you get the feeling this is a process akin to a rehabilitation of Skrewdriver as the godfathers of Grunge, with offers of tour support slots from Nirvana and The Voodoo Queens to boot.

The problem I have with The Beasties, however, is not so much ideological, it's more to do with the whole tradition of American Werdness, a brand of artistic irresponsibility that also has its moral equivalent. You see, where I come from, nobody was weird: you could be complex or simple, modern or traditional, a surrealist or a traditionalist, but to be just 'weird' basically meant you were a wannabe avant gardist who had nothing new to say and tried to get away with it by shouting meaningless syllables. If you were weird you were sad.

Now I acknowledge American Werdness as a somewhat different

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Goyette (Canada) -
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Yoshihide
(Australia/Japan)

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animal. First of all you don't have to have studied your tradition for years and then pretend you're aiming at destroying it; you just have a smoke and a laugh and you write silly songs instead of just dancing and drinking, you get weird and it's fun. OK, fair enough, it's surrealism as a democratic alternative to deer hunting.

Well, I'm not big on deer hunting and that must be why I'm left cold by The Beastie Boys. All right, so they were a thrash punk band before they decided to go Hip-Hop and, more recently, join a West Coast Coltrane cult. Weird, if you ask me, but not much else. For one thing, they never sing about love or death! What's the point of being unusual if you're not going to sing about love or death, the only two interesting and unusual things to happen in life? What were The Velvet and The Stooges singing about? Do you think André Breton would have thought of surrealism if he had never fallen in love or never been afraid of dying? When it comes down to it, why the hell should people spend time and money to record a song like "Egg Head On Mico" if it wasn't to keep their minds off love and death?

Of course, any capitalist art is also an indication of what's escaping from, but I'm afraid that's not enough. It seems that too many drugged-up adolescents with limited vocabularies define the peak of artistic inventiveness as "weirdness", form bands who release weird music, and actually take a pride in it. Need we be concerned? For fans only

SYLVESTER BALAZARD

Beck

Mellow Gold

GEFFEN GED 24634 CD/MC/P

"I'm a loser baby so why don't you kill me?" So runs the refrain on "Loser", the opening track on the debut album from new LA wacko Beck. You might call it an anti-anthem for the slackier generation. Cool nihilism and willful obfuscation figure prominently in Beck's weird world, lyrical coherence taking a back seat to stream of consciousness verbiage. And there's an interesting collection of disparate musical styles gathered here — Hip-Hop, blues, folk, psychedelia — filtered through Beck's living room recording

process, and arriving at an aural his own. Much of it is arranged around his acoustic guitar playing, evidence of his LA coffeehouse origins. The same goes for his singing — his deep, resonant voice and deadpan delivery are faintly reminiscent of Warren Zevon.

Sometimes you feel he's trying just a bit too hard, on the overstated wackiness of "Pay No Mind (Snooters)", for instance, to wit: "The *snoos rise high through the garbage pal sky like a grant oldo crushing the sun*". Otherwise where things are more interesting and occasionally quite dark — "Steal My Body Home" and "Blackhole" leave the impression of a deep melancholia underpinning Beck's oddness.

Some of the funkiest stuff manages to sound like across between George Clinton and Sonic Youth. Where the lyrics are occasionally more focused Beck displays a gift for both acid wit, on "Niteamer Hippy Girl", and dissonant rage, on "Motherfucker" (sic).

Mellow Gold is self-indulgent and ultimately too wayward to engender lasting interest. But Beck does embody a sense of disengagement from the world that is reflected in his music — he has a song called "MTV Makes Me Want To Smoke Crack", sadly not included here — and his sense of otherness, however absurdly conveyed, that also makes him a strangely attractive proposition.

TOM RUDGE

John Cale

Music For A New Society

YELLOW MOON 003 CD

Nico

Chelsea Girl

POLYDOR B39 209 CD

John Cale is one of Rock's great overlords of consistent inconsistency, inspired eclecticism, cultivated mania. He is an example to all his practitioners of WHAT ROCK COULD BE — not merely a riff, a pose, a drole substitute, not endlessly overextended while teen boy angst, not Mick Jagger in aerobic pants and not one more generation of monosyllabic drugs, but, as Patti Smith once put it in a Cale-produced song, *a sea of possibilities*.

Music For A New Society (originally

released on Ze in 1982) is a record which hyperventilates meaning into that hackneyed phrase 'a genuine one off' — even by Cale's standard of abandon this is out on a twitching limb. In terms of lineage, we're talking Big Star's *Sister Lovers*, Neil Young's *Tonight's The Night*, Robert Wyatt's *Rock Bottom*, Lou Reed's *Berlin* — Downer Rock, symphonies for the Fucked Up. But whereas a lot of Fucked Up masterpieces are easy to admire but often hard to like (if they were people, you'd avoid them), *New Society* reverberates with an uncanny air of compassion. If a good Laingian psychiatrist went off the rails and set some of his case studies to a sparse and wayward backing, this is probably what it would sound like.

It's interesting to play *New Society* alongside the Nico reissue (from 1966), as alongside other post-Velvet records. Even at their most fucked-up, Cale's ex-partners in crime always sprung from inside a kind of somnolent vapour. From "Heron" to *Berlin* and even unto the 'resurrection' of *New York and Magic And Loss*, Lou Reed sings about extreme emotional states but never enunciates or embodies them as such: the grain of his voice remains uninflected. This is not necessarily a bad thing. *Chelsea Girl*, for instance, captures Nico at her best, before she slipped into the sad caricature of herself which she peddled in later years. Here she was given exquisite tailor-made songs, whose elegant delicacy veils a calm world weariness which is amused and New York savvy, rather than painfully cod-Gothic. The title song has always been irresistible, and songs like "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams" (Reed), "Little Sister" (Reed/Cale) and, especially, Cale's "Winter Song" have — of their kind — never been bettered.

Alongside the Nico/Reed aesthetic, *New Society* is the sound of a nervous system which has had its drugs suddenly drawn away, leaving the pains of self and world — subdued for soling — to come rushing back in. Cale delivers the sound of an unravelling psyche, the sound of rock vernacular gone rocky, of a practised lyricism flaking away to reveal something eerie, a genuinely Unconscious song, primal, perturbed. This is singing with the carapace off — one of rock's few

genuinely schizophrenic

Unusually for Fucked Up Rock, Cale writes about others, not just himself. Even on songs for swingin' suicides like "Damn Life" and "Taking 'Your' Life In 'Your' Hands", the lyrical "You" is not bombed-out and boorishly opaque, but expansive, inclusive. *New Society's* best songs — "Samies", "Broken Bird", "Chinese Envy" — are about the eggshell delusion of others, not the paltry "poor me" of the singer-songwriter.

There are moments on *New Society* when you can hear the phantom process of thought behind Cale's singing, the way you could hear Miles Davis thinking (in) the spaces between his notes. Cale's mouth is a crucible. His words are uprooted supports. The psychology of his Song is unfathomable, and the areas he haunts quite beyond the emotional range of most rock music. *New Society* is a reminder of things that rock has forgotten how to feel.

NAN PENFAN

Codene

The White Birch

SUB POP SP 118/299 CD/MC/LP

New York trio Codene play slow, achingly slow. Lassitude and inertia permeate songs that often sound paralysed by numbness. It's tempting to see this as the logical extension of the American slacker mentality, but ultimately they are divorced from that ethos. With Codene, the space and silence between phrases — and even notes — are just as vital as the elongated, lingering chords. What's implied has as much significance as what's actually stated. Their bleak, desolate vistas portray youthful lives drained away by liquor, narcotics, and frustration. Stephen Immerwahr's disaffected, sorrowing vocals add a further twist.

The White Birch, their second full length album, sees the band develop a raison d'être. Previously songs would shuffle aimlessly along in perpetual drowsiness. Now there seems to be a motivation, as if their benumbed music has found acceptance and something to strive towards. Nowhere is this more evident than on the closing "Wired", where gentle, lulling passages are shattered by abrupt, staccato phrases. A bleak and unnervingly attractive album — and this from the

label usually associated with Grunge
JOHN ROGERS

Company John's 91 Volumes 1-3

INCUS CD 1 671 7718 3CD

Three hours of live, freely improvised music recorded over three consecutive nights in London by a cast of nine in 2.1 different combinations assembled by veteran improvising guitarist Derek Bailey, all on three separate CDs

Bailey does not compose, and eschews the development of form, band or repertoire, factors every other genre of music relies upon. He helps shape the music of Company by creating the conditions under which its members meet, throwing people together on stage who have often hardly met or heard of each other before, let alone played together. This isn't the only way to improvise — in fact it's a bloody funny way and suffers inevitable losses — but it can also have extraordinary benefits

It's fascinating, for example, to hear champion squawker John Zorn struggling to keep up with upstart guitarist Bucklehead one day, then stealing the show a couple of days later with some of his most fantastically imaginative saxophone playing. The instant rapport that Bucklehead's receptive mutant metal guitar builds up with vocalist Vanessa Mackness, and virtually every player here, is remarkable. Though he's the least experienced (40 years Bailey's junior), he sounds the most confidently assured player throughout. Bailey seems almost shy in comparison, though he does create one of my favourite pivotal moments, where he brings in the most exquisite plinky consonances for his trio with trombonist Yves Robert and violinist Alexander Balanescu, creating the ground for some of the most focused explorations in the whole set.

The three CDs are full of unique, wonderful moments and unrepeatable textures that no other individuals engaged in any other form of music making could ever have come up with. Taken as a whole, the set is a little long and personally I wouldn't have included some of the more aimless performances, but otherwise this is engrossing and very



entertaining music, which surely achieves everything Bailey wants it to. Some of the best improv to appear on CD for ages

RICHARD SCOTT

Mike Cooper & Viv Dugan Corringham Avant Roots

MASH 002 CD

Various Artists Argentine Adventures

SLAM SLAMCO 304 CD

These albums demonstrate that not only can self-respecting 'serious' musicians dabble in cultural crosspollination, but that it's also nigher to come up with buzz words to name your own individual style. Saxophonist George Haslam's South American travogue ended with the musicians dubbing the result "Elmo Jazz", Cooper and Corringham's album is self-styled as "Avant Roots" with passing reference to "past, present and future musics"

The latter is a strange hybrid of primitive rhythm boxes, veteran blues/free player Cooper's sweet and capricious guitar lines, Corringham's deep soulful voice and the ensemble doing battle with bubble 'n' squeak electronics that have escaped from Stockhausen's Kontakte

On "Detritus", a wry mish mash of Hawaiian guitar and scrambled radio, they're not just subverting the listener's preconceptions, but actually subverting the source material, although they don't bring to it anything of substance. And is Corringham singing in tongues on "Burning" or is standard LMC floor-singer gobbledygook? More successful are a cover of Sonny Sharrock's "Impressions Of Africa", some fine straight-ish blues and the Eastern European flavoured incantations of "White Powder"

Far more rewarding is the Elmo Jazz of George Haslam's what I did on my holidays' sonic scrapbook. Recorded with a number of musicians in Buenos Aires who formed a temporary quintet, this take on Argentine musics — the Carnavetto, New Tango, and the sad folksong form, Vidala — starts from a jazz standpoint and stretches out into some extended free-ish improvisations. The prevailing jazz

sensibility sits well with the rhythmic roots of the source material and, crucially, the musicians are steeped in these traditions already (with Haslam a willing learner)

Outstanding is pianist Ruben Ferrero, whose poised Latin syncopations shift around the beat, wandering off into sinuous repetitive figures. He shines on "Los Muchachos De Buenos Aires", Haslam rallying a brass too with his spiralling bantone lines. It's certainly not cultural soup

DAVID MORRISON

Cosmic Baby Thinking About This

LOGIC 74.32 119605 COSMIGLP

Various Artists The Music Of Changes: A Brief History Of Ambient Volume Three

VIRGIN AMBT 3 2CD

Exactly how many words the Eskimos have for the word while evades me, but I do know it's a lot. More than 20. Closer to home, our word, Ambient, has of late become so fraught with multiple meanings that some new words — 20 shades, perhaps — are required, if only to stop the glut of disparate records all catalogued thus

Take, for instance, Cosmic Baby, wunderkind of the Berlin Techno scene. Beneath his terrible nom de disque (Scholiplattensname? Teutonic Sub-Ed) lies a conservative pianist who recognises Erik Satie as a godfather. His album's title track is the latest version of Gymnopédies, other influences include Michael Nyman ("Brooklyn"), Vangelis ("Fantasia") and Pink Floyd ("Au Dessous Des Nuages"). The rest of *Thinking About This* is pure Techno product: scattered Acid squelches, rolling beats and sleeve notes which include a poem about dolphins and some beachside notes on the 'who am I, where am I, what am I?' theme. It's a pleasant album, even — for a 28 year old composer — a rather disingenuous one

Virgin's latest addition to its solidly selling library of Ambient compilations is a standard back catalogue reshuffle: Frip, Rain Tree Crow, King Crimson, Sakamoto and (but of course) Eno are here. More recent material is contributed by

Sub Pop: through SRD

Incus, Mash, Slam: through Cadillac, Impetus, These

Logic: through BPMG

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Two of Glass's most elemental works ("portraits of nature," the composer calls them) here definitively performed by the Atlanta Symphony orchestra and chorus

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William Orbit and Bark Psychosis. All the tracks have been released before, even if approximately 25 per cent are at present unavailable. Ambient, at least for this double CD set, is more closely defined as a loose, uncluttered sound which concentrates on process rather than structure. This allows the inclusion of disc wizard Prince Far-I, whose shuddering "Throw Away Your Gun" competes with Nasir al-Fatih Ali Khairi's "Musti Must" for the set's high point. Contributions from Seigen Ono, Luray and Stefan Mick on the other hand, illustrate admirably EnO's dictum that Ambient music should contain within itself the capacity to be ignored.

LOUISE GRAY

Marilyn Crispell Stellar Pulsations

LEO LR 194 CD

Marcel Worms Jazz In 20th Century Piano Music

BW HAUST 9403 CD

"Among musicians and listeners, composition and improvisation have become quasi-religious issues, with dogmatic absolutists on both sides of the fence. My personal folly is to try to reconnect the two." Thus Robert Cogan, whose fiery piano duo, *Costellar Pulsations*, kicks off US pianist Marilyn Crispell's new Leo release. But at the risk of upsetting Cogan, I'd say it's not impossible to recognise the distinctive virtues of each.

Manfred Niehaus's puzzling *Concerto For Marilyn* unfortunately has the virtues of neither — coming across like film music in a sub-Bartók idiom, against which Crispell improvises with her customary fury. Maybe that's how it's supposed to sound, however, what with "Concerto For Chico", "Concerto For Harpo" and "Concerto To Provoké Groucho" among the titles of the piece's various movements. It's not very funny, though, nor inspiring. The most impressive piece on the disc is Pozzi Escoto's *Miniball*, performed by Crispell with marvelous Don Byron on clarinet and superb Gerry Hemingway on percussion. It begins with a motif based on an anaphora by the medieval mystic nun Hildegard von Bingen, in that it makes a change from Gerishwin

Who inevitably figures in *Jazz In 20th Century Piano Music*, though improvisation less directly so. On this release, pianist Marcel Worms's diet consists mostly of miniatures, showing how 'straight' composers have responded to jazz. Some favourites are included — Stravinsky's *Ragtime* and Gershwin's *Preludes*. The "throw off" virtuosity of *Prelude II* is sloppy, which made me wonder about the piece I didn't know. *Ragtime* was originally conceived for small orchestra in 1918. Igor later said he'd never heard ragtime then, but got his knowledge of the idiom from seeing sheet music by the so-called "King Of Ragtime", Irving Berlin. "You know," Berlin later confessed, "I never did find out what ragtime was." (That was one of many funny things he said.) I'm not sure Stravinsky did either.

There are other representatives of the early 20th century neo-classical crowd — Milhaud, Hindemith, and the self-styled "Bad Boy Of Music" Georges Antheil's one and a half minute *Jazz Sonata*. The "revelation" of this release is that 'straight' composers have mostly skimmed the surface textures of jazz rather than drawing from its improvised heart. May be pianist/composer Frédéric Rzewski is an exception, though. The composed part of his *North American Ballads* is supposed to sound like improvisation and vice versa, he says. Worms gives us one of the ballads, "Which Side Are You On?", and this is one politically committed composer I'd like to hear more of on disc.

ANDY HAMILTON

Earth Nation Thoughts In Past Future

WEA 4509 95557 CDLP

Ambush The Ambush

HARTHOUSE HMC 04 CD

If you've read Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* you'll already be acquainted with "bleeding neonitals". To Coupland they're a scourge, elderly baby-boomers who sold out at the earliest possible opportunity and are still feeling guilty. Earth Nation's upstart mobile trance music makes a play for just such an audience. They offer a route out of the Ambient cul-de-sac that can only be described as a Prog rock ode to

Armageddon. This is their past future and for the most part you wish they'd kept it to themselves. Even leaving aside the pompous religious references (titles like "Lord Gveth", "Lord Takeith" and "Revelation") and tortuous walls of guitar, this is a soulless soundtrack desperately in search of a firm. But what really grates is the air of musical imperialism.

As Earth Nation's name might suggest, there are 'World Music' influences afoot. The Eastern chants and cool reggae draw parallels with Bill Laswell and his band of well-heeled travellers. But just as the dance technology seems to be bolted on like some designer accessory, so the ethnic references exist as mere cultural cunios, interesting in the short term but ultimately empty, adding little to the music but telling us plenty about the prejudices of Earth Nation — what they consider 'different', 'alien', 'exotic'. If 'World Music' has any meaning, it lies not in this passive adorning of local ideas but in the creation of common languages — the kind of longitudinal communication that has already seen rap and reggae travel the globe as voices speaking out against cultural oppression.

Would Oliver Lieb agree? Once known as Soicelab but now calling himself Ambush, he too makes Ambient textures with ethnic sounds. But where Earth Nation peddle fibre optic tourism, Lieb's understanding of the world and its music seems to come from some deeper source.

Far more languid in mood than the tracks on *Thoughts In Past Future*, Lieb's gentle tides of Ambience cast subtle spells on the mind, even as they appear bound and driven by their multifarious layers of percussion sounds that vary from the digital through bell and shell-like trickles to a full blown chorus of tub thumping drummers. At certain points this leads to an air of conflict. Lieb seems unsure as to whether he's celebrating some primitive Western idea of festival rites or just chilling out. But when the various strands converge, as in the battling ferocity of "Jungle Fever", there's an air of excitement reminiscent of a carnival in full flow.

SUSAN MASTERS

Etoile De Dakar

Xalis

POPULAR AFRICAN MUSIC PAPAOC 303 CD

Etoile De Dakar Volume Two: Thapathiohy

STERNS 3000 CD

Yousou N'Dour has virtually godlike status in West Africa, and the past few years have seen various Western record labels attempt to turn him into an international pop icon. His popularity in Africa is partly explained by Xalis, Etoile's very charming first album, recorded in 1978. The Cuban influence is strong, the sound controlled, neat and lady. Yousou already sings like a young god, his voice still modulate, but already suggesting an intense yearning for pop he never equalled.

Last year's release by Sterns of 1979's *Abao Gueye* (STCD 3004) charted Etoile's transformation of salsa into mbakax before your very ears. *Thapathiohy*, recorded a year later, almost achieves *Abao Gueye*'s explosiveness, as times the band barely manage to hang on to the rhythms and each other. The threat of the whole show caving in on itself makes the rather creaky recording (which sounds much older than it is) even more passionately intense.

RICHARD SCOTT

Dr John Television

MEAGRM 40252 CD

Professor Longhair The Big Easy

BLUE MOON CDM 094 CD

Taj Mahal Dancing The Blues

PRIVATE MUSIC PMS 01 005 B212 CD

The modern listener, torn by the most Sophoclean dilemmas, thirsts after a time when choosing what to sing in your shower didn't make you liable to justify your views on feminism, racism or child abuse, a time when you could actually play guitar solos without being called a wanker, a time when you'd not have to choose between rock 'n' roll and dance music, because they were one and the same thing. The modern listener, then, could do much worse than to think of New Orleans, and land

dreams, the city that gave us jazz and rock 'n' roll. Who, indeed, could be more 'for real' than Dr John and Professor Longhair? Both are venerable veterans of the ivories, the sort of people who wouldn't practise voodoo as an adopted rock star thrill but because their parents taught them about it, the sort of people who never had to put on an accent or learn from records because all the music that has mattered this century had been sung by the guy next door for generations. So anyway, the modern listener buys Television and *The Big Easy*. But easy it isn't.

Dr John's voice is hard to resist, what with that swampy Louisiana speak and his slurring Southern croak, but really, the rest of it is way too slick for comfort. This, after all, is a major release by an artist who just appeared in the same TV ad as Randy Brecker, so one really shouldn't expect a monument of 'for real-ness'.

The Big Easy, on the other hand, is a raw live recording of Longhair in 1977, and the sort of CD that makes you think how preposterous the whole idea of recording music is. There is a feeling that if you had been there, maybe — probably —

Longhair's piano would have hit you in the heart, taken your hand and led you to a mysterious and wonderful place, but as it is all you get here is information: somebody played the piano in such-and-such a club on such-and-such a night, and this is what he played, but you can't hear it, the first 20 seconds are lovely, you hear the piano, but after that you hear only a memory.

"So what should I do?" thinks the distressed modern listener. Getting a copy of *Dancing The Blues* might be one answer. Taj Mahal is only interested in getting ever nearer to the heart of the blues (no messing around with shallow reinvention), and the reason this is no stale pursuit exercise is that Taj knows the same heart beats at the centre of the blues, soul, funk, rap, etc. The ska-blues cover of The Four Tops' "I Can't Help Myself" is a wonder in this respect, unmistakably heartfelt, and if anything, more original than the original. What makes this lovable is that Taj Mahal's ambition is not to reproduce The Supremes, Howlin' Wolf or T-Bone Walker, but to understand what they were aiming



Random Acoustics: through Impetus

4AD: through Pinnacle/RTM

Mammoth: through SRD

Shanachie: through Koch

at and to get there himself. And when he succeeds, which is sometimes, although the formal invention may seem minimal, the results are entirely his. Also, you can dance to his record.

SYLVESTER BALAZARD

Firebox

Firebox

POLAR BEAR RECORDINGS/PBS/MC

Atmosphere and mood are not difficult to conjure, a first-time-zither player is as likely to produce an effective soundtrack for a film as an experienced violinist or saxophonist. People interested in following real time performance — those who listen to jazz and free improvisation — are therefore suspicious of ambient sounds. Echo and reverberation seem to be an excuse to lay back and relax rather than compete and interact.

However, as Firebox show, this is really a false dichotomy. The fact that films use 'facile' means to evoke moods does not mean that ambient effects cannot engage our full attention. Howard Bevan (cello, guitar) and Peter Marsh (bass, guitar) summon up heady atmospheres, but weigh them with hair-trigger timing. Whereas the first generation of free improvisors wanted to combine the instrumental prowess of advanced jazz with the unpredictability of avant-garde classical music, Bevan and Marsh improvise with elements derived from funk grooves and rock feedback — and the teetering extremes of *musique concrete*.

The patches of rhythm that surface are jagged, recalling Beethoven, while some dippy deviations recall Prog rock (Pink Floyd, King Crimson) — but Firebox's real strength is sensitivity to texture. Just when you are losing patience with an excursion they round it off with impressive panache — they know exactly where they were even if you didn't.

An interest in blending industrial and ethereal textures also characterised Can, but Firebox don't merely patter along; their shapes have the classical definiteness of free improvisation. The epic (20 minutes long) "Deluge" is wistful, eviscerated and strangely powerful. Hissy sound quality seems inevitable for music so disregarding of conventional genres, but Polar Bear Recordings (also

home to Conspiracy) are to be congratulated for giving us Firebox. **BEN WATSON**

Frisque Concordance

Spellings

RANDOM ACOUSTICS/RA001 CD

Frank Gratkowski/

Georg Graewe

Viscitudes

RANDOM ACOUSTICS/RA002 CD

Georg Graewe

Chamber Works 1990-92

RANDOM ACOUSTICS/RA003 CD

Random Acoustics is a new German Improv label founded by Georg Graewe. First up is Georg's quartet, Frisque Concordance, comprising John Butcher (saxes), Hans Schneider (double bass), Martin Blume (drums) and the 'leader' at the piano. This recording documents only the second time the group had performed together. Quite astonishing when you hear how finely balanced and cohesive their compositional senses: Graewe's delicate touch is at home with Butcher's elegant and technically resourceful reeds, Blume moves with a self-effacing rapidity around the kit, filling out the collective sound without resorting to an identifiable pulse. Schneider's concise riffs and scrapes bring a darker hue to the music and are most effective when the phrasing is fragmentary. Don't expect fireworks from this quartet, but refined, highly sensitive group interaction.

Graewe's duets with alto saxophonist Frank Gratkowski achieve a similar level of cohesion. Short pieces, most under five minutes, 11 in all. "VE 2" starts cinchily with Gratkowski spluttering through spittle, on "VE 5" he snags with his mouthpiece — an effect first brought to my attention via Steve Lacy. The album also displays a tendency towards broad and sweeping melodies, but not based on repetition. Graewe constantly varies the approach from subdued accompanying chords to dramatic, percussive clusters, and provides the complex rhythmic momentum on most pieces.

Chamber Works 1990-92 features three examples of Graewe's directed improvisations "15 Duets" for sax

musicians (Phil Minton, Michael Moore, Anne Le Baron, Hans Schneider, Gerry Hemingway and Graewell) demands that all possible duo combinations of the instruments be played 11 times with durations ranging from one to 11 beats. The resulting piece is busy with vivacious exchanges "Flavours A" is based on given "macro rhythms" for each of its five parts and directed by Graewell from the piano, within these Phil Wachsmann (violin) and Melynn Poore (tuba), two undersung British-based improvisers, are left to their own devices. Finally, a series of chords generated from a 12-tone row is the touchstone for "Variations Q" featuring Graewell, Moore, Horst Grabosch and Ernst Reysiger. Anyone who still thinks that fixed instructions or preordained material (and we're not talking jazz "heads" here) inhibits improvisation, after they've heard this album, needs their imagination tested. Random Acoustics has arrived with three first-rate releases.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

**Hancock/Shorter/
Carter/Williams/
Roney
A Tribute To Miles**
QUEST/REPRISE 936245059 CD

**Roy Hargrove Quintet
Roy Hargrove Meets The Tenor
Giants**
VERVE 529019 CD

A *Tribute To Miles* features a further permutation of the VSOP group—longtime Miles stalwarts Hancock, Shorter, Carter and Williams—that has from time to time sported trumpeters Freddie Hubbard and Wynton Marsalis in the role of Miles. Here the baton is passed to Wallace Roney, who in the late 80s appeared to have developed an intense, lyrical yet economical style of his own. Certainly his albums (such as *Intuition* and *The Standard Bearer*), his playing on Cindy Blackman's red-hot *Cocky Red*, and his work with Tony Williams, suggested a player who was capable of putting all the young neo-classical players, including Wynton Marsalis, in the shade. It is curious, therefore, that with the most challenging rhythm section he has yet worked with he should shrink from asserting any originality and

retreat into a series of the kind of Miles Davisisms that characterized (not surprisingly) his playing on last year's posthumous live recording, *Miles And Quincy Live At Montreux*. On the evidence of this new *Tribute CD*, it seems Messrs Hancock, Carter and Williams need a powerful, assertive personality, such as Freddie Hubbard, to goose them out of auto pilot mode, as it is, this is disappointingly *deja vu* material. Roney has a few more pit stops to make before he completes his rites of passage.

Roy Hargrove has worked so diligently within the hard bop nexus that today he can rightly claim to be one of its finest exponents, irrespective of generation. While it's tempting to brand previous albums like *When We Were Young* as mining the old Blue Note groove of the late 50s and early 60s, it would be a gross miscarriage of justice to Tenor Giants, Hargrove's finest album to date.

With so many comings and goings — he and his group rub shoulders with guest tenor saxophonists Johnny Griffin, Branford Marsalis, Stanley Turrentine and Joshua Redman — recordings such as this tend to be fragmentary, unfocused affairs. However, each guest player fits into Hargrove's tight and talented group without upsetting the artistic direction the leader (whose playing is exemplary) has mapped out.

While this record succeeds on its own terms, as a great example of contemporary hard bop, it also succeeds within the context of the older recordings that have given it inspiration. Significantly, this is an album that can be played alongside the classics of yesteryear without ever once giving the feeling of settling for second best, second time around. That is no mean achievement. Roy Hargrove has completed his rites of passage.

STUART NICHOLSON

**Kristin Hersh
Strings**
440 BAO 4006 CD/EP

**Lisa Germano
Happiness**
440 4005 CD

Ex-Throwing Muses singer Kristin Hersh recasts the term "alternative

rock" as an estrangement from technology and industrial trappings. On *Strings* Hersh seeks refuge in an organic opposition, resting four tracks from her recent *Hiss And Makers* album by adding in a string sextet. Musically, it's an easy transition, neatly side-stepping the kind of lofty superciliousness affected by bands bringing classical ideas to pop's heathen hordes. The vibrant raw nature of the string instruments bolster the folkiness of the material, conjuring an era when songs were fashioned as an everyday craft. Owing as much to Michael Nyman as to Vivaldi or Bartok, ex-Banshee Martin McCarrick's arrangements contrast passages of fevered aggression with others of melancholic reflection, capturing perfectly the confused vulnerability that Hersh brings to tracks like "A Loon" and "Velvet Days."

Lisa Germano, an American singer who's already released two LPs in her native land, also thrives on organic opposition. Her music might be electrified but here violin and mandolin vie with the electric guitars. Even when the distortion pedal finally hits the floor in "Puppet" its inanimate strains seem emasculated, bootlegged from another band and buffed to a gleaming smoothness.

Such ambiguities haunt *Happiness*, a disc that veers from the experimental to the baldly commercial and is marked with a fluid androgyny. Its lighter moments sound like Matt Johnson's *Burning Blue Soul* fused with Erik Satie's poignant grace. Elsewhere, the toppling tempos give way to a lumbering folk-rock (expect "Energy" to congeal on the airwaves for almost as long as Bryan Adams). Germano's greatest feat is remaining fleet of foot (lyrically and vocally) in this musical quagmire. Her husky tones fit between gender types and characterisations (is she an "Inconsiderate Bitch" or "Everybody's Victim"?), with an ease that is traditionally a male prerogative. Perhaps that's why, when influences are sought, it's Lou Reed and Leonard Cohen who immediately spring to mind.

SUSAN MASTERS

Charlie Hunter Trio
Charlie Hunter Trio

PHANTOM/THRECORDS/PRAWN SONG HR 0066 CD

You wouldn't know Charlie Hunter unless you were a fan of The Disposable Heroes Of Hiphopry. He was the guitarist who added the elements of funk, jazz and subtlety to their polemical Hip-hop, and played memorable accompaniment to Michael Franti's poetry on the track "Music And Politics." Now that the group has disbanded, Hunter has packed up his Hip-hop rhythms and formed a straight jazz fusion trio with Dave Ellis and Jay Lane on sax and drums, respectively.

The Hunter Trio operates at similar energy levels to Hiphopry, diving into their music headfirst and only occasionally coming up for air. Hunter's technical ability on his customised eight string guitar — five treble strings and three bass, which means he plays the bottom lines and solos simultaneously — is phenomenal. Listen to how he rips through "20, 30, 40, 50, 60, Dead", or gives a sweet solo interpretation of Charles Mingus's "Fables Of Faubus." What he does best, however, is Funk. "Funky Niblets", ably set up by Lane's drums and embellished by Hunter's quirky, warped guitar, and Ellis's glassy-toned tenor, is as raucous as any James Brown groove.

There are plenty of good tracks on the album — the stealthy ballad, "The Telephone's A Ringin'", in particular, is a real gem. If there are any criticisms, it's that the trio occasionally fall into virtuosic fusion clichés, and the overall sound of Hunter's guitar is disappointingly tiny. I know nothing about the complexities of putting combined bass and guitar lines through the same amp and getting a decent sound, but they sure could do with a bit more bottom.

LAURA CONNELLY

**Huun-Huur-Tu
60 Horses In My Herd**
SHANACHE 640500 CD/EP

**Shu-de
Voices From The Distant Steppe**
REAL WORLD CDRW 41 CD

On the northern edge of Mongolia, Tuva has been an independent state

since 1990. Effectively closed for years, it is now open for contact with the rest of the world. Hence the rise of interest in Tuvan traditional singing (there are several keen practitioners in Britain). A group like Huun-Huuri-Tu, founded in 1992, represents a new approach to the music. Like the excellent Hungenanband Muskas, they are young musicians in pursuit of "old and forgotten" songs, learnt directly from old people.

The basic tool of a Tuvan folk singer is a frighteningly low voice. I imagine being used by shamans to scare teenage boys witless during initiation ceremonies. Over this quivering low drone the singer simultaneously makes a melody using eerie whistling harmonics. Now and then he shakes a rattie made from the ankle bones of a sheep enclosed in a bull's testicle.

The two groups featured on these CDs have tamed this dark beast of a voice and taught it fine melodies in a rich medieval context of gut fiddles, lutes and conch shells. They often use the high overtones as backing vocals. So, although this singing is traditionally *asolo* music, most of the tracks here show a developing modern group sound.

"Shu-de" is an expression you shout to encourage your horse. Their albums are a little cooler, with less abandon in the playing, and a dryer recording. They include one woman singer and some fine jaws harp playing. But for me Huun-Huuri-Tu have a clearer idea of the sound they want. Their name refers to the way light breaks up on the grasslands around sunrise or sunset. Plus their lead singer is named Kool, so you can tell they mean business. Centred on Kool's strong singing and fiddle playing, they convince me more as a band than Shu-De and make a stirring and very listenable music.

CLIVE BELL

Roland Kirk Does Your Horse Have Lions

SHAND 71406.2CD

At first hearing, Roland Kirk seems a perfect canon for the jazz canon, a man you can trust with the oral tradition. His most famous tracks ("The Black And Crazy Blues", "The Inflated Tear", "Volunteered Slavery") suggest just such a figure, a roly-poly multi-musician as much at



ease with Varèse as with Sonny Boy Williamson, a showman who harked back to minstrel shows and the circus, good old irascible Rahsaan with his dreams and visions, the Steve Wonder of 60s jazz.

There's more to Kirk than this, however, more astonishment and still more voice shock. Listen to the 1967 version of "The Inflated Tear", for instance. Here Kirk plays three horns simultaneously, in order to get that stark and startling World War Four air raid siren atmosphere across. 27 years later those horns—the flexaphone, the stretch and the menzello—are still utterly alien instruments, unused and unheard (except, intriguingly, by Björk, whose love of Kirk comes through on "The Anchor Song", the last track on her *Debut* album).

"The Inflated Tear" starts with 44 seconds of tuned, metallic percussion, ashmattering, twisting comet spray of handbells and clock chimcs which warp time and rhythm with the same sense-shifting ambience as The Art Ensemble Of Chicago's *People In Sorrow*. It's a remarkable fragment of music, but the real surprises of this double CD anthology come on the tracks taken from Kirk's 1975 album *The Case Of The Three Sided Dream In Audio Colour*. In his sleeve notes, Hal Wilner calls this three sided album "a jazz Sergeant Pepper", and this gives a sense of the studio pranksterism and tape manipulation which runs through the selected tracks. One 58 second interlude, "Conversation", opens with a *Forbidden Planet* type computer commanding Kirk to sleep and then to dream, to which the jazz man's overdubbed voice replies by quarrelling over electricity, money and pianos, each reply fading in and out in montage. Another 16 second interlude features a collage of stampeding horses. It's tempting to rank Kirk in the tradition of studio fiction which includes Lee Perry, George Martin and Jimi Hendrix. "Water For Robeson And Williams", a lush tapestry of manimba, cello and harp taken from his penultimate 1976 album *Other Folks' Music*. It starts with a heavily echoed excerpt of Paul Robeson reciting from *Othello*, a fragment Kirk apparently sneaked into the mix by waving a tape recorder around as the session started.

Sound drew vivid pictures in Kirk's head, and he translated these into the fictional environments of his final albums. From this collage perspective, his famous duets—for one take on a new meaning. There's an example (from 1970) of him playing *Ovork's* Hovs theme tune and "Sentimental Journey" simultaneously, and the entwined double melody uncannily prefigures the thematic overlaps in Philip Glass.

At these moments, Kirk must have seemed like an astonishing special effect, anovely. But this 'gimmicky' tag is just asposure to the real future shock which Kirk's music embodied. At its best, Kirk shrouded his avant-jazz techniques in an aesthetic of black mystery based on the 36 black notes of the keyboard. His experiments were mocking and self-deprecating, a low-key and minimalist adventure, fragments of which crop up in the intro to "Blackness" and the 76 second long manifesto for broken glass and whistle, "Black Mystery Has Been Revealed", which unfortunately doesn't get onto this compilation. What does get included, however, makes it an essential purchase.

KODWO ESHUN

The Last Poets Scatterap/Home

BONAGE 56471 CD/MC

The old adage that you should speak quietly and carry a big stick has rarely been taken up by rappers. From the bragging and boasting of the Old School, to the pornographic violence of gangsta, restraint and rap have made uneasy bedfellows. Better to shout loud and carry an Un.

Which is what makes this set such an oddity. Of course, anything from The Last Poets carries some weight older than Old School, you'd expect them to ignore the rules. Being hailed as 'elder statesmen' of anything is apointed chalice, particularly with something as youthful as rap. Jalal and Suleman (former Poet Umar Bin Hassan) has gone his own way, releasing the excellent *Be Bop Or Be Dead* on Anom last year. He has responded to this challenge not by trying to modernise their sound but by reclaiming rap as their own territory. The *Home* half of this set works by building loops of rhythm, melody and

chorus as a backdrop for a series of incursive raps "Minority Of One" features scathing lyrics at once shadowed and heightened by the seductive and hypnotic rhythms. After 20 years of this, they're in no hurry, and they let the track build slowly, drawing the listener into their own point of view. "The Drama" takes this further. A poem rapped over a heartbeat-slow chant, what could sound like hectoring or agit-prop from so many others here carries the ring of authenticity.

Far less successful is the family of tracks in the Scatterplot section, which foregoes storytelling for vague philosophizing over a series of anonymous funky beats. Each track is notionally a rap about one of the five senses, but they're distinctly lightweight and instantly forgettable.

A highly variable album then, but at its best — questioning, provocative, fresh — proof that The Last Poets are far from played out.

DAVID LUBICH

Georgy Ligeti Concertos

SONY SK 58 945 CD

Hungarian composer Georgy Ligeti escaped from Stalinism when the Hungarian uprising of 1956 collapsed. He made his way to Cologne and became exposed to Stockhausen and the avant-garde. From his first Western works, Ligeti's unusual history made him an independent, and he developed what he calls an "attitude of not belonging." His conviction to the "artificiality of style" generates ironic distance even from his own music, which makes it very hard to place.

Throughout, though, there's a sense of perfection of orchestration

and a delight in acoustic illusion. The *Requiem* that Stanley Kubrick appropriated for 2001: A Space Odyssey was from Ligeti's "Clocks and Clouds" period in the 60s and 70s — music made up of "hard" mechanical patterns and "soft" textural drifts. The Cello Concerto and Chamber Concerto, both on this new release, are from that time. Apparently more in the tradition is the Piano Concerto of 1985–87, also featured, where Ligeti's constant reference point of his countryman Bartok resurfaces.

All three concertos were performed at last year's Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. The Cello Concerto is a pretty minimal though enormously difficult work, but the performances by the Ensemble Modern led by Peter Eotvos of all these pieces are brilliantly clear. This might just be one of the essential recordings of modern music.

ANDY HAMILTON

John McLaughlin & The Free Spirits

Live In Tokyo
VERVE 521 870 CD

John Scofield & Pat Metheny

I Can See Your House From Here
BLUE NOTE CDP 7243 8 27765 CD

Bill Frisell This Land

ELECTRA NONESUCH 7559 79316 CD

The axemen cometh

McLaughlin's 80s rediscovery of the acoustic guitar produced some of the most interesting fusion of the last two decades, so his decision to revert to electric with the ominously

named *Free Spirits* boded ill, especially with the horrible iron pumping racket of drummer Dennis Chambers in tow. But in fact Tokyo, for all its bombastic length (77 minutes), is at least tolerable. McLaughlin favours a thoughtful, mellifluous guitar tone as opposed to the laser gun broadsides of fuzz-heavy fingerwork that characterised the excesses of his Mahavishnu Orchestra days. Despite the presence of Hammond organ ace Joey DeFrancesco, this isn't, thank God, Lifetime revisited.

Revisiting, unfortunately, is what the Metheny/Scofield CD is all about. In a way this collaboration was waiting to happen: both men milking melodic penchant for folksy Americana and deliver it in comparable style. Here, instead of striking sparks off each other, these two notoriously nice bikers spend the album politely ceding the limelight to each other, achieving sod all. The net result is an unimpressive reprise of the duldest moments of their most recent small-group recordings.

Bill Frisell's latest album is light years ahead of such polished corporate product. It shares familiar thematic territory with Scofield and Metheny: fragments of anthems, hymns, C&W and R&B are admired, but Frisell doesn't deal in picturebook nostalgia; only the undisciplined, titillating ecstasies of memory. The music swarms with the inchoate, the half-said, the half-forgotten. It's not a museum, but living history. It skitters around on post-bop time signatures, is crisscrossed with braying down-home guitar warmly supported by winds and brass, and has an endearingly ramshackle quality

reminiscent of a high school band.

There's much to admire here, but over 62 minutes all this cleverness gets a mite weansome. The instrumental textures are remorselessly thick and indigestibly colourless. Consequently the music has little expressive or emotional flexibility, there's not much to choose between songs lumpily abstract ("Julius Hemphill") and songs tender ("Monica Jane"). No, pop pickers, it's not as good as *How A Little Faith*. But it's not as bad as *I Can See Your House From Here*, either.

PAUL STUMP

Van Morrison A Night In San Francisco

DUKE POLYGRAM 521 290 CD/RC

The quality that has redeemed Van Morrison's music over the last ten years, as he has waxed increasingly beatific, transcendent or just plain repetitive, has been the downright cussedness of his delivery. When he sings "No Guru, No Method, No Teacher", in his staccato peppery bark, might as well be "No Hawks, No Circles, A Slap In The Teeth Often Offends." It's this bizarre intractability that's made some of his wisper records since 1982's *Beautiful Vision* so listenable.

It's also what redeems the double live set from a degree of bombast and complacency. Recorded last December, it features Morrison as ringmaster of a sprawling, all-star showband including George F. Fame, saxist Candy Dulfer, singers Brian Kennedy and Morrison's daughter Shana, with showcase slots for blues veterans Junior Wells and Jimmy Witherspoon and John Lee Hooker. Playing the unlikely part of the Last

There is only one path.

Soul Man, Morrison is surprisingly convincing and monolithic — so aware of himself as an abiding institution that the band now come on and chant "Van the Man! Van the Man!" at encore time. Morrison meanwhile stands apart from it all, coughing out the names of his players as if they were impotent teenagers tugging at his ankles. The miscalculation in the revue approach, of course, is that it shows up some of his songs for the perfunctory cotton wool they are. There's an extraordinary moment halfway through Brian Kennedy's droopy reading of "Havel! Told You Lately That I Love You?" when the bass muscles in and takes over, and suddenly a song materialises out of nowhere.

The upside to a live recording like this is that the songs, when they really seem to have nowhere to go, can just go hell for leather, for the pure ride of it — there's a superbly moody spin put on "See Me Through/Soldier of Fortune", while "In The Garden" mutates effortlessly into an impassioned "You Send Me".

Personally, I can take or leave most of the all-star pure blues content (although George Fame's version of "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid" comes across as impudently breezy in this context). For sheer relentlessness, though, the set can't be faulted.

JONATHAN ROHNNEY

Plastikman Recycled Plastik

NOVA/PLATE/NOVA 30 CD

Yokota

The Frankfurt-Tokyo Connection
HARTH/HOUSE/HCD 4 CD

Various Artists

La Collection

FNAC 592306 2CD

"Faceless Techno Ballads" The grumbings of the enemy recycled, repackaged and proudly worn across countless ravers' T-shirted chests. Beneath this 'sampler strikes back' irony lies an interesting consensus, namely that machines are the antithesis of humanity — violent, insensitive, ugly creations that make loads of noise and aren't too hot on subtlety.

Taking this concord to its ultimate extreme is Plastikman, aka Richie Hawtin. *Recycled Plastik*, a collection of old and new material, celebrates hardcore Techno as it was before it dropped the 'H' and shot off on its vanspeed trip to oblivion. Hawtin's electronic tribalism strips music back to the basics, a bubbling minimalism that takes the pounding energy of heavy industry as its starting point, then weaves ever more convoluted rhythms into the spluttering wall of sound.

But at a time when machines are being rapidly replaced by the silicon chip (itself expendable), such mechanical machismo is starting to seem not just dated but positively reactionary. As the dust gathers on our manufacturing plants it's possible to step back and see machines both as objects of aesthetic value and as symbols of a working population seemingly sharing the same fate — economic oblivion. In this regard, Joy Division, the 80s prophets of this industrial entrapment, might hold the key to Techno's future.

From Ian Curtis's robotic dancing to the rigid patterns that held their music in perpetual arm lock, Joy Division were the perfect synthesis of

man and machine. The mechanical stoicism of their beats heightened the sense of tragedy in Curtis's lyrics, even as it clashed with the breakdown lurking below.

Giving Joy Division as a major influence, Susumu Yokota is a Japanese artist attempting to shift Techno beyond the rave scene's restrictive parameters. So far so good. His debut LP is released on Sven Väth's Harthouse label, and the music is an Acid swirl, spinning rhythms and harmonies from both East and West and mixing exotic gamelan sounds with traces of early 80s synth-pop. "Tune For A Replicant" has the jerky motions of a technoid computer game, complete with laser struggles, while other tracks draw on the complex pop structures of The Associates and Pet Shop Boys for inspiration. But somehow it never quite gets. If Yokota's hardcore has the inviting texture of a molten marshmallow, it never fully digests the rather insubstantial substances of his influences. You end up peering in awe at his more experimental moments while quietly preferring the more straight ahead, sonorous Acid pound of tracks like "Parwaves" and "Trancewheel".

For Techno that truly engages with the emotions, opening the listener to something more than just another dose of narcotic mesmerism, FNAC's *La Collection* is a double CD compilation spanning the full spectrum of the French label's dance output. The first CD drifts through a pool of some of the most narcissistic Garage and deep House I've ever heard, this is music swimming in the warm liquid of its own reflection. On the second CD, however, Feedback and Renegade Legion both endeavour to reanimate the man-

machine interface, a relationship that is brilliantly consummated in Laurent Garnier's "Breathless".

Sampling life as a hyperreal rush between emotional extremes, Garnier goes straight to the heart of Joy Division's machine-fusion blues. The result's sound like the rain leaked windows of a hurtling train. Add to this the gothic horror of Lunatic Asylum's "Planet Sex", and you've got one of the most exciting collections of electronic dance music around.

SUSAN MASTERS

Dominique Regef Tourneries

VAND OEUVRE 9306 CD

Jeff Song & Matt Turner Love & Fear

00 05CSH 10 CD

Dominique Regef is an amazing (French) hurdy gurdy player who has recontextualised the role of this traditional folk instrument in improvised music. *Tourneries* demonstrates the instrument's self-sufficiency and versatility in solo performance as well as in a couple of duets with electric guitarist.

Dominique Repecaud and the brilliant soprano saxophonist Michel Donedà. Regef creates an intense soundscape of whirling strings, buzzing drones and strident polyphonic effects akin to an electronic keyboard. There is something excessive, hysterical even, in the sounds and images the hurdy gurdy conjures in this Improv context.

Traditional Korean instruments are also becoming more familiar in improvised music. To Sang-Won Park (kayagum) and Jin Hi Kim (komungo) add the name Jeff Song,

A | change is as / good as | a rest.
| | | | |
| | | | | it gets. **K**

another kayagum (Korean zither) player based in the USA. He and his duo partner Matt Turner (cello) are graduates of the New England Conservatory in Boston where they began their study of contemporary improvisation. Love & Fear consists of 13 short pieces which are generally harmonious in mood, there's an agreeable sense of space and alert exploration created in the instrumentals, though I'm not so taken by the vocalising, which has less presence.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

The Rollins Band Weight

IMAGO 727872 1034 CD/MC/LP

Described as "the world's first politically correct savage", Henry Rollins is a living contradiction. An urbane raconteur in his spoken word performances, his song lyrics are simplistic to the point where, if it weren't for his almost manic delivery, they would be laughable. 14 years into his career, he's now evolved a chanting, bellowing style that owes much to his heroes Public Enemy, placing syllables on the beat with a rapper's precision but with none of the fakery rock musicians often fall into when imitating Hip-hop. Not so much sung as slung (hard and low).

The contrast with his loud, musicianly band is ironic. With the addition of Defunkt/Decoding Society bassist Melvin Gibbs, and talking note of guitarist Chris Haskett's current collaboration with Charles Gayle, you might expect the music to float off into jazz funk stratospheres. But it's Rollins's love of Black Sabbath (one track is titled "Volume 4") that serves as the music's centrifugal force, the musicians beaver away from within, embellishing, updating and extemporising around this rather precise and literal update of "Wheels Of Confusion".

The most compelling moments come when the band explodes into Hendrixian funk, pushing their punk jazz to the brink of free territory. It's then that you realise that The Rollins Band are out on a limb in another regard, transcending the musical apartheid between MTV rock and the underground. It might be a quack task, but it's one in which Weight succeeds admirably.

JAKUBOWSKI

Sharkboy Matinee

MUDE 2 CD/MC/LP

Sharkboy's singer, guitarist and principal writer Avy approaches her pop from a background of avant garde experimentation and a liking for minimalist composers. On Matinee, something of a multi-faceted debut, the latter shows through in subtle ways — Sharkboy's music is melodic, hypnotic, with a hint of systems music in some of the sax and guitar arpeggios, especially on "Forest Fire". Their instrumentation is eclectic, with cello lines curling around the tunes and some askew trumpet blasts cutting through the pop structures. When Sharkboy build their songs into a dissonant pile-up — the closing moments of "Road" — things can get too cluttered. Avy's voice works better when given more space to breathe. It's an unusual instrument, unspectacular but poised and hinting at a chanteuse sensuality. Matinee is flawed but still compulsive listening, fresh and far tastier than the heavy sediments of Grunge or the re-rolled dog-ends of the (so-called) 'New Wave Of New Wave' that currently define the UK's alternative rock mainstream.

DAVE MORRISON

Sonic Youth Experimental Jet Set, Trash And No Star

GEFFEN CD 24632 CD/MC/LP

Noise fuels Sonic Youth. Cultural, political, quoddenoise the Sonics scavenge through soundbites with the aplomb of Hip-Hop artists. The difference is that instead of regurgitating their fodder, the Sonics digest, then rearrange it. A playful iconography serves as their guide, a willingness to experiment with their sticky paste. The results: collages of urban America's aural soup.

Compared to its predecessors, *Experimental Jet Set* features shorter compositions, more prominent percussion and an enlarged stylistic gamut. Thurston Moore's recent involvement with Rudolph Grey's Blue Humans and the Shamballa project (with drummer William Hooker and



guitarist Elliott Sharp) may have catalysed the change. *Jet Set* is a middle ground between the Humans' marathon free jazz/distortion sessions and Hooker's percussion centred works. Plaque drumming speeds these new Sonic snapshots along, the sprawling guitars of old are reigned in as but one of the pieces clock in at below five minutes.

Sonic Youth slip between styles as easily as politicians slip into scandals. The parameters stretch one moment they are Industrial, bashing their way through metal offal with a spanner ("Tokyo Eye"), the next they're psychedelic, luxuriating in the dopey love haze of "Slank".

For unadventurous Youth fans (an oxymoron?), the distortion quotient is satisfied by "Self Obsessed And Severe", and "Screaming Skull" dollpops out that social commentary on a rubbery metallic riff. Yet overall, *Experimental Jet Set* is Sonic Youth extending their repertoire upward and outward. It's to be expected the Noise changes, and as its masters and mistress, so must they.

JULIE KARLASKA

Karlheinz Stockhausen Klavierstück-VIII, XI

MARTIN 6142 CD

It's surprising, on the face of it, that these wonderful pieces have been taken up so slowly by contemporary piano players. Even those perfectly content to load up their strings with wood screws and erasers for the Cage *Sonatas And Interludes* have been nifty of Stockhausen's concentrated sequence which, after all, only a decade younger.

It was after hearing David Tudor play *Clage* that Stockhausen began a second group of *Klavierstücke*, revising the first to take account of the American's technical range. I've listened to Herbert Henck's Wergo disc of these things for years, but here Tudor is a complete revelation. His handling of the very beautiful "VII", with its astonishing spectrum of timbres and pitch shadings, is one of the most profound performances of modern times. And it's sign declarations to that effect.

By contrast, even Tudor fails to make anything very compelling out of "XI", one of the pioneering aleatoric works, in which the pianist is

NovaMute, Nude: through Pinnacle/RTM

Hart House: through WEA

FNAC: through Pinnacle

Vand'oeuvre: through Semantic

OO Discs: 502 Anton Street, Bridgeport, CT 06606-2121 USA

Nat Art: through Harmonia Mundi

Imago: through RMC

required to randomise 19 separate fragments of music with freely chosen dynamic marking and speeds, linking some groups with sustained *ferrnato*. Better, I think, to concentrate entirely on the earlier pieces. Stockhausen regarded these as pencil sketches made in pursuit of the radical new language that emerged in the later 50s (no composer has ever had such a clear sense of goals and directions). This record can't be recommended highly enough. It's 'demanding', sure, and there's no doubt that piano writing and performance techniques have since advanced far beyond, particularly in the area of sub-harmonic linking. Nevertheless, these remain crucial documents in 20th-century music and ought to be in any serious collection.

BRIAN MORTON

Cecil Taylor
Tzotzi/Hummer/Tzotzi
LEG CD/LR 162 CO

Cecil Taylor
Oluluwa
SOL. NOTE 1211 39 CD

The Feel Trio
Celebrated Blazons
RPP COS 8 CO

Typically, black avant-garde jazz is based on the cabalistic personal mythologies of its practitioners. Think of Roland Kirk's "Black Mystery", Anthony Braxton's *To-Axiom* *Writings*, Ornette Coleman's hermeneutic theory. This is the drive behind Cecil Taylor's "Black Code Methodology", although it's not clear whether the incantatory poetry and persuasive possession he weaves through these three CDs (two

reissues, one new release) belong to that system.

On *Oluluwa* (1986), *Tzotzi/Hummer/Tzotzi* (1987) and *Celebrated Blazons* (a trio featuring Taylor, bassist William Parker and drummer Tony Oxley, recorded in 1990 but only now getting a release), Taylor adopts a faltering pseudo-English accent to narrate excerpts from ongoing work. "13,420 years ago, 13,420 years ago, the divine followers of Ku-to-ji Ku-to-ji... 'Is all you hear on Tzotzi' before the story is crashed to bits by snarls, groans, yelps and moans. Other sequences float by, "Darkness moves across screens", "Other mummies are thirteen", before they are swallowed up by concrete poetry. Taylor builds up this crumbing audio mosaic for ten minutes before letting it all fall into the drift and sway of a panomimic bass/violin tapestry, full of spiralling keyboard trills and runs and Leroy Jenkins's scribble/slide of a violin, which dominates the rest of the CD. On *Oluluwa*, William Parker's bowed bass performs a similar function to Jenkins's violin, imparting a sinuous, lithe sensation to lush arrangements for trombone, tenor sax and marimba, which move with a torrential hammering force, or scramble round with a rigorous atonalism. On *Celebrated Blazons*, the scraps of ornate poetry which whip past on the other two CDs devolve into heteroglossalolia, a manic muttering mumble which Taylor maintains through the dense clusters of pontilist piano attacks. Taylor's poetry of whispers and chants makes no obvious sense, but it makes its own explicit demands, insisting you become an initiate to the inscrutable mists of black free

jazz, which in Taylor's hands comes off as a music full of confidence, a sound taking giant steps around the fractal infinity of its own universe.

KODWO ESUJAH

Henry Threadgill
Too Much Sugar For A Dime
AXCDH 514 258 CO

Henry Threadgill
Song Out Of My Trees
BLACK SAINT 12015 CO

I don't buy the bit in Threadgill's sleeve note to the first of these albums about the wonderment of contemplating the difference between coloured plastic bags, but I'll readily concur with his comment that "these great musicians working together so was some kind of Shangri-La, or better." But then that's only part of the story. On *Too Much Sugar*, Threadgill's regular septet, Very Very Circus, get the very best of compositional frames to play in: like the harpodic hoedown "Little Pocket Size Demons", or the magnificent dosing track "Try Some Ammonia" with its crisp, driving theme — the kind hard boppers would kill for — married with an equally persuasive Afro funk undertow. These are tunes which will have you humming in the street almost without realising it. The arrangements — some augmenting the core ensemble of two guitars, two tubas, French horn, drums and Threadgill's alto sax with Latin percussion, a violin trio, singers, more drums and yet another tuba — turn the colour controls up to maximum. Bill Laswell's presence in the control room seems to have sorted out Threadgill's perennial problem with production. The sound here is

big and robust, panned wide across the stereo, where both tubas and drums get to play more upfront in the mix. Goodtime music imbued with the cerebral. Even at market prices (sucks to Island UK who aren't releasing it there), *Too Much Sugar* is a sweet to savour.

The five cuts on *Song Out Of My Trees*, cut with various groupings of old and new playing partners, are not songs in the accepted sense, but about (sleeve note again) "song in its ritual effect, a higher spiritual manifestation, coming from a very basic place." The recitals don't always make it. "Grief" sounds achingly convincing until Armina Claudine Myers's mechanical harpsichord makes its strangely inappropriate entrance (she turns up trumps, though, on the title track with some get down and groove organ soloing). But "Crea" with its rapping guitar lines oscillating somewhere between the classics and Euro gypsy grooves, and "Over The River Boat", where the guitars play Beauty to pianist Myra Melford's Beast, really do bring the notes to life.

DAVID ILLIC

James Blood Ulmer
Harmolodic Guitar With Strings
OW 878 CO

There is a telling quote in the sleeve notes to this latest dispatch from the maverick US guitarist James Blood Ulmer: "Since they call my music all kinds of things in America — blues, funk, all kinds of things at once — I decided I was going to separate the stuff and play everything separate so there won't be any mistake what I'm playing." This declaration reneges on the promise (made by jazz in the 40s and



harmolodics in the BOs—two of the traditions of which Ulmer is a recipient of transcending music's feel/heard dichotomy. So this is Ulmer playing alongside a string quartet, using portentous Bartokian rapture to set off his jamming new wave blues. It doesn't work.

On *Sixes Of America*, Ulmer's one time mentor Ornette Coleman worked string romanticism into the midst of free jazz to brilliant effect: here the soaring strings seem merely pretexts. Ulmer should realize that his strength lies in delivering everything at once: rock and blues power, jazz delicacy and avant-garde abstraction. It looks as if the dead hand of economic survival has taken its toll on one of the few musicians who seemed capable of changing everything.

Ben Watson

Various Artists Ethnotechno: Sonic Anthropology Volume One WAX TRAX/TY 7211 CD

Various Artists The Definition Of Hardcore REINFORCED/RIVET 003 CD

Ethnotechno is a post-rave update of Byrne & Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. The 'sample ds, sample DAT' approach of the compilation's various intelligent techno heads sounds and feels more enjoyable than, say, the pan-global virtual studio jams convened by Bill Laswell, even if the latter are a more reciprocal meeting between West and non-West. In fact, the more deracinated the samples the better, as with the Burmese drumming that adds just a tint of otherness to High Lonesome Sound System's shimmering electronics, or the way *Juno Reactor's* "Alash (When I Graze My Beautiful Sheep)" turns guttural Siberian throat singing into a gurgling Acidic bassline. Other high points include "Limbo" by Sandoz (aka Richard Kirk), a lush lattice of polyrhythms around a Yoruba chant, and Steel Pom Rhino's "AKA Electric," in which pygmy plansong figures as a rippling, water-splash sound surface.

Of course, Techno is itself the new World Music, in so far as it's boys tinkering with the same hi-tech toys, speaking the same non-verbal

Esperanto, whether they're in San Francisco, Sheffield, Frankfurt or Tokyo. Techno inhabits Jon Hassell's Fourth World, where all musics are equally deracinated and thus equally up for grabs as they float through the virtual ether.

At the opposite extreme—totally local, UK specific—is another post-rave subgenre, 'Arktore' Techno, offers its own kind of ersatz ethnicity, cobbled together out of pop-cut detritus, shards of soul or reggae vocals. Nth generation breakbeats, video nasty soundbites. For its increasingly multiracial underclass audience, Jungle offers a tribal identity you might say it's the residue of class consciousness left after the withering away of the organised Labourite proletariat.

Junglist kids inhabit the UK's internal colonies—inner city zones and suburban estates—then Jungle is a kind of post-modern dub reggae several times faster of course, in keeping with the pace of hyper-reality, but with the same senseless bass, and the same aura of spiritual exile, sufferation and survivalism. Instead of Zion, though, Utopia for Jungle is getting off your face at the weekend, and instead of the brotherhood of I & I, there's paranoia and disconnection. Jungle is for those who don't just survive but thrive in the concrete jungle, similarly, calling yourself 'dark' (1993's dominant 'Arktore style and buzzword') means 'don't fuck with me'.

The Reinforced roster, once the pioneers of the 'dark' sound, are now presiding over 'Arktore's' shift to a new sophistication, taking on elements from jazz, Quiet Storm, Garage and Ambient. This compilation captures the label midway between 'Dark' and the New Thing, making a music at once morbid and mellow: a phantasmic swarm of soul diva whimpers, strings, jazz-inflected chords, Cabaret Voltaire synth and off-kilter death funk rhythms that recall Material circa "Cugin". This is the titillating, fever-dream sound of British culture falling apart and struggling to reintegrate itself.

Labels like Reinforced and Moving Shadow are pushing 'Arktore' forward to the point where it could blossom into a real culture. Britain's very own equivalent to (as opposed



to imitation) of High-Pop. This noise is its birth pangs.

SIPHO RETHOLDS

Ernie Watts Reaching Up JVC 2031 CD

Charlie Haden's Quartet West Always Say Goodbye VERVE 521 501 CD

For someone of his brilliance and consistency, saxophonist Ernie Watts is extraordinarily underrated. As Nat Hentoff observes in the sleeve notes to *Reaching Up*, Watts allies total technical command to essential lymism. Think of him as a corrective to the sometimes desiccated Joe Henderson and the garrulous David Murray.

Reaching Up is in many ways an improvement on 1988's *Ernie Watts Quartet*, but for some reason doesn't quite gel. The main problem's Jack DeJohnette, untypically over-powering on drums, straining too hard for effect. Watts contributes five original compositions, but somehow these don't seem as fine as those he's contributed in recent years to Quartet West.

This very beautiful band has been Watts's main jazz home for some time now. As a bassist, composer and bandleader, Charlie Haden is a towering figure in jazz, and in this group, mistakenly regarded by some as his 'bebop band', he makes a claim for jazz as art form. The apparently effortless nature of these performances should not disguise the fact that this music of the highest quality by a state of the art ensemble.

In the past Quartet West has been reproached for indulging in nostalgia, intercutting old recordings of Jo Stafford and Billie Holiday into its evocations of Raymond Chandler and film noir. If there's a criticism of *Always Say Goodbye* it's that this formula is repeated too closely. The title track is achingly beautiful, but there's an excess of melancholia when we get "Ou-Es-Tu Mon Amour?" followed by "Avenue Of Stars" followed by "Low Key Lightly". But what's wrong with a bit of a waltz? Especially when Quartet West beats hands down just about any other contemporary jazz.

Leo: through New Note, Harmonia Mundi, Impetus

Black Saint, DFW, Soul Note: through Harmonia Mundi

FMF: through Cadillac

Axiom: through Rough Trade retail

JVC: through New Note

Reinforced, Wax Trax: through SRD

ensemble you'd care to mention.

ANDY HAMILTON

Jah Wobble's *Invaders Of The Heart* *Take Me To God*

ISLAND ILPS 8017 CD

In the great bazaar of world music, Jah Wobble is the Benwick Street market trader who's managed to lay his hands on a spare stall in the souk and is hustling his wares for all he's worth. "Nice bit of ragga?" Lovely juicy cumbia, lady — straight from Colombia! "Take Me To God" revels in its truly heterogeneity even more wholeheartedly than its predecessor, *Rising Above Bedlam*. That album seemed more of a piece — at least, you could just about imagine how a live act could be founded on it — but the follow-up, if uneven, is even more willing to be flaky. Some of it's so arch as to be barely listenable, other bits are tinged with relishable madness.

Along with Wobble's basscore of sidekicks — guitarist Justin Adams, keyboard player Mark Fenda — all human life is here. Andrea Oliver, Jaki Lebezeit, Nagma Akhtar, Chaka Demus And Pliers, Baaba Maal. But much of the time, they're faces glimpsed in the crowd, peering out from the multitude like the figures in a *Where's Wally?* book. Or rather, they're peering out of a crowd of millions of Wallys, and every Wally's Wobble. He's much more visible here than last time, either chanting in his strange rebarbative croak, or slopping his odd stoned pantheist world view all over the lyrics (strangely, the famous Wobble bass throb seems to have receded into the mid).

Some of it doesn't work — the Spanish stuff still sounds bogus, and on "The Sun Does Rise" Cranberries singer Dolores O'Riordan does too many Hopkins-like for health. Later on, though, things get rebarbatively weird — Wobble intones his mad personal apocalypse on "I Love Everybody" and spits out a stream of inspired Situationist bile on "No Change Is Sexy." And "Yoga Of The Nightclub" is outstandingly crazed, pitting Gavin Friday's baleful rasp against the tumbling vocal curlicues of ghazal queen Nagma Akhtar and Henry Beckett's incendiary, fractured trumpet.



Out of Bedlam and straight into Babel — but it's best when the driver decides not to take the scenic route.
JONATHAN ROHNEY

Dominic Woosley *Straylight*

RECYCLE OR DIE/EYE-Q 000 001 CD

Hildenbeutel *Looking Beyond*

RO 0002 CD

Oliver Lieb *Constellation*

RO 0003 CD

Baked Beans *Baked Beans*

RO 0004 CD

Stevie Be Zet *Archak Modulation*

RO 0005 CD

Eye Q is a German label whose 'Ambient' releases have been selling as imports for \$19 a pop. Now WEA have snapped them up for their Recycle Or Die offshoot. (Is it me or don't both those label names sound like kitchen furniture companies?)

From its packaging on in, this stuff whispers, there's nothing to fear here. And the packaging is something else, very ownable, collectable, don't they look lovely together in that eye-tech CD rack? The textural flavour of these boxes is probably the high point of the Eye-Q experience, however, the music inside — well, we're talking music to show off your new stereo with, just like the good old days of *Dark Side Of The Quad Demonstration*. It's just unreconstructed — and interchangeable — Euro Prog music. Even the more seductive moments — when things get a bit, four percussive (I refuse to say 'funky') — sound like the sort of music Hollywood tries over films set in some outback, when the herd of bison emerge triumphantly over the lip of the savannah.

It's music that alludes to expanses, depths, horizons, galaxies (you just know what the titles are going to be like, and they are: *The Oceans Of Infinity*, "Subsonic Interferences", "Man In The Machine", "The Journey", "Prelude For Timeless Time"). But in reality it's *Prelude For Prozac*, Music For Haemorrhoidal

Cushions

I once offended the good Dr Eno by reviewing two of his early Ambient releases alongside the latest Herb Alpert album — which really was rather seductive in its own bass-heavy anglophone-funk fashion — concluding that the good 'Erb worked better as Ambient fresher precisely because it was unintentionally oriented towards that end, less laboured, less 'look at me I'm human methaqualone'. I still feel that way. When I want spiritual 'ambience' I reach for Jane Siberry, Stina Nordenstam, Dean Martin, Giorgio Moroder, Dan Hicks And His Hot Licks — oh, you name it, and it can work as Ambient if we decide to designate it so. But what doesn't click is over-designed muzak, which can end up sounding awfully sterile. Eye QED

IAN PENNAN

Chizuko Yoshihiro *Conscious Mind*

VERVE FORECAST 518 343 CD

Orphy Robinson *The Vibes Describes*

BLUE NOTE COBET 1609 CD

New British jazz is media-ordained as the opther of some mythical black pop culture. It's given a perennial halo of cheesy visual signifiers: backlighting, speakeasy fagsmoke, flickering neon. Artists are presented as either Guccistreet hipsters or African seers. The music is expected to be similarly mean and moody, reaching out to a twilight world of constructed (fictional) blackness. Rarely strategic, dangerous, or interesting, just an ABRM's ideal image of 'the street'. Japanese saxophonist Yoshihiro and her back-up squad of young Brit jazz lions fall straight into this cultural trap, vibist Robinson doesn't.

On *Conscious Mind*, Yoshihiro's purloining of black pop music is fairly inoffensive but also ineffectual in trying to cross the space buffer of Lonnie Liston Smith with the twinkly fusion panism of George Duke and the chunky suaveness of Ornette. She merely sounds like a hip Mr Hills Ronny Jordan, Steve Williamson and Max Beesley are prominently namechecked, but lend little distinction. Great for the in-car tape deck, but not much else.

Eye Q, Recycle Or Die: through WEA

Knitting Factory, Stallplate: through These

Ear Rational, MUWorks: through Impetus

Cuneiform: through ReR/These

NG, Bloody Butterfly, PSF: retailed at Rough Trade Shops or mail order from Japan Overseas, 6-1-21 Ueshio, Temmō-ku, Osaka 543, Japan (send \$1 — US funds only — for catalogue)

Orghy Robinson, by comparison, wastes little energy acquiring spurious ghetto cred. *The Vibes* Describes contains a slab of dance music ("Make A Change") but it's stark, bald and individual, while the token soul-sop is a smart take on The Strangers' "Golden Brown" which leeches out a hitherto unheard complexity in the song's harmonies. Robinson's ballooning sense of outer harmony and atmosphere enables him to capsize conventional notions of British jazz.

Like many of his peers, his playings thorny and committed, but the ravishing and tasteful upholstery of synthesizers (played by the excellent Joe Bashoun) bestow a European air on the proceedings. There are overtones here of Coutouner-Céle, Daniel Goyane, Didier Lockwood On "The Eternal Spirit" and "The Justafusion" there's even that McLaughlin-esque Rivera touch of winsome chromaticism and fey nostalgia. But Robinson doesn't allow us easy sounds or easy assumptions — he's not doing a Gary Burton on us. He never allows his lycrism to lull or his paces to outstay their welcome; the wearbut production keeps an edge on the music, and there are enough deconstructing firecrackers to keep anyone's eyes and ears open for the duration — and for any number of subsequent plays. Best vibrations

PAUL STURP

in brief club trax

Kodwo Eshun gets hardcore, goes underground, etc

Fila Brazilia Pots And Pans/The Sheriff PORKY'S PRODUCTIONS PORK0131 Busy busy busy. Side one swaggers and grows with a charismatic showiness, breaking into a very fine Vocoder shimmy and Fela-esque chorus, smashing beats into broken glass along the way. Side two slows down through New Jersey Garage bass, joining the dots between the Sade-esque pontilism of Jovanni and the Latinwave wank of Masters At Work. Hic-shakingly enticing, Fila are dancefloor devils to the bone. Brilliant.

Le Funk Mob Tribulations Extra Seniorjorials (H.O. WAX PROMO) The Hip Hop instrumental is coming into its own these days and the best track here, "Ravers", gestures towards that space between The Orb and Cypress Hill, between two kinds of drug-tech interfaces that you just know is gonna be very successful sometime soon. "Ravers" is the sound of subtraction: The elements in melodic Hi-Pop which cohere at the front of the soundspace, are here reduced into ciphers of themselves, abrupt fragments of museum walls, resampled snatches of mute trumpets. All tracks are nice but would someone please listen to The Art Ensemble's *People In Sorrow* and proceed accordingly?

Rufuge Kru/Cloud Nine Two On One EP (MOVING SHADOWX 201 LP) Moving Shadow are utterly consistent in their releases and this EP is no exception. Goldie, aka Rufuge Kru, is the Derrick May of Ardcore Techno and his track "Fury" shows why: a surging line of synths hammers away at a battery of cyber polyrhythms but there's an undertone of melancholy that's utterly fragile and disconsolate. So Hardcore's frenzied gives way to a captivating despair, a vortex of vertigo-inducing patterns that pulse in and out of the echolalia of sampled and resampled voices. Nookie (aka Cloud Nine's "Gun Star Hero") plays harsh against soft, even though it's moving at 145 bpm and upwards, it doesn't feel fast. It eschews the manic for the mellow, floating along at a supersonic speed of synth-persuaded synapses. Both tracks are guaranteed purchases.

Various Artists Deepest Shade Of Techno REFLECTIVE REFLECTIP 001 Excellent compilation from Reflective Records, the Techno offshoot of the avant garde hardcore label Reinforced. What they've accessed is Techno at its most fluid, most lambent — neither Industrial nor progressive, but post-fusion, as close to the soothing Garage ambience of Nu Groove and Mr Fingers as it is to the hi-tech precision of early Transmat records. The brilliant Octave One offer "Nicolette", a flanged sequence of synth exhalations with a sordid and decaying piano fill, while Project 625 produce "Come Closer", a

breathily lullaby that caresses the ear with its syncretized tones. Eddie Fowkes's "Check One Boy" is a post-Mantronix samba while Beltram's "Earth And Nightfall" is the sombre sound of dying embers. One of the very best anthologies you'll hear this year, anywhere.

in brief outer limits

David Ilic stalks the margins with the weird and the wacky

William Hooker Shambala: Duets With Thurston Moore And Elliott Sharp KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KFW 151 CD **Elliott Sharp Westwork** (EARRATIONAL ECD 1040 CD) Crosstalk between free jazz and Grungecore hasn't exactly sparked a musical revolution, but there's plenty of fruitful dialogue still taking place nonetheless. *Shambala* is a joyous noise, even if the rather anaemic sound quality on the Hooker/Moore session does its best to dampen down the effect. Moore's guitar drone gently nudges the VU levels towards overload, ploughing a single deep furrow, allowing Hooker's bulbous rolling sounds to float like Sunny Murray's did back in the '70s, only well into the second of their two duos does Moore begin to stretch out into pealing blues signatures that scream Sonny Sharrock. The ubiquitous Elliott Sharp provides a more testing, rhythmical platform for Hooker, weaving in and around the drums like a hairy car burning up the rubber, with Hooker prompted into finding a more varied response.

Hooker and Moore both think their music "should", at the very least, change the way people relate to

category", but it's Sharp's music which brings that idea closer to reality. His solo improvisation is the key to his multiple directions, and the live *Westwork* reveals some of that genre meltdown. Most of it has a burning intensity and logic which is mysterious and engaging, combining clattering hammer rhythms, wailing feedback, buzzsaw effects and the crusty insignia of Heavy Metal and the blues, all skewed, sampled and layered every which way.

Virgil Moorefield Distractions On The Way To The King's Party (CLINEFOPR BUNE 56 CD) This debut outing as leader by the one-time Glenn Branca and Swans drummer features a track entitled "Something To Offend Everyone" but is in fact an extremely well mannered set. The ten "distractions" are all composed pieces for a nine-piece group (four brass/woods, three guitars, bass and drums) pitching at the art-rock/jazz mode but never really advancing the form. There are cheap jokes and pieces of kitsch like the Stevie Reich "in roll piece" "The Garden Of Earthly Delights", there's the brash and dissonant "No Warning", with its licks stolen from Bill Laswell's *Baselines*, and the brass really getting to work, blasting away like car horns, and the contrapuntal *four de fable*, "Noise Is The Price We Pay For Signal". The banal "Seelbegriff" and the almost folksy sounding "Healing Power", aren't distracting enough, however, making you wish Moorefield and his band would just stuff the protocol and go for broke instead.

Ruins Graviyaunosch (ING 003 CD) **Ruins Early Works** (BLOODY BUTTERFLY 2XCSB 004 CD) *Graviyaunosch*, with Steve Albini co-

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producing on the sex studio cuts, marks a disappointing return to old habits by this Japanese bass and drums combo. The mix of thrashcore power and 70s Progrock complexity (the falsetto vocals, the punishing riffs and tricky time signatures remorselessly plunder French avant rockers Magma) is as well honed as ever, but the suffocating uniformity and cramped sounding delivery makes their music seem as grey as the cover art. Only the three live cuts which make up over half the playing time make it worth buying, where live processing and electro percussive bolt-ons provide much needed textural succour, mixing in world beats and other worldly sounds as improvised asides.

Early Works is a compilation of live cuts and studio outtakes dating back to 1986. The coarse cut fidelity (and we are talking rough — that, apparently, is how the label likes it) actually works in Ruins' favour, giving the music a much thicker skin. There's more of punk's brazen in-joke at work in these early takes, particularly on the three cuts which add John Zorn's squalling alto, although the singular didactic vision of Ruins' drummer/founder Tatsuya Yoshida still predominates.

Michihiro Sato Works Of

(WACON 1P57 28CD) A Japanese acquaintance once spoke of Tsugaru Shamisen, a music founded in the folk forms of northern Japan, as being the Orient's answer to the blues. That being the case, Michihiro Sato could well be the Far East Robert Johnson, playing the shamisen (a three stringed instrument which looks like a banjo but doesn't sound like one) with both awesome passion and virtuosity. In the mid-80s, *Ganyu Island*, a collection of duos with John Zorn, whetted my appetite for hearing Sato play alone. On four of the eight tracks here, he does just that. (The others feature a guesting shakuhachi player.) His aggressive striking of the strings produces a crisp, clacking sound, the notes are then bent or else left to gently dissipate — and the high fidelity recording captures the music's every nuance. How much this music reflects the purely traditional aspects of Tsugaru Shamisen is a question best directed to ethnomusicologists, but it is a

candid window on Sato's emotions and it will charm your ears off, however 'uninformed' those ears may be.

Various Artists State Of The Union

(HAWKWORKS MW 1015 CD) More from Elliott Sharp, this time as tour guide, routing around Downtown Manhattan's subway set of improvisors, agit rockers, performance artists, minimalists, No Wavers, neo-beats and deadbeats. He rounds up all the usual suspects (Johns Lurie and Zorn, Mofungo, God Is My Co-Pilot, Tuli Kupferberg and Marc Ribot) plus several lesser-known forces. This CD (reissue of a 1982 release) adds 34 minutes of new recordings. Unlike both *Island Of Sonity* and *Reel Estate*, Sharp's other, later compilations of New York New Music, this release eschews the sampler format, keeping things short and sweet. Over 60 different artists get it down in a minute or less, with Sharp assembling the multifarious soundbites collage style, building them into four individual sequences, sound mirrors to reflect the crazed, contradictory character of the City That Never Sleeps.

outline composition

Rob Young haits and harangues the classical mob

If composition has always been about choice, it will have an abundance of that commodity as it heads into the future — composers are increasingly being commissioned by the kind of bizarre, ragbag ensembles that are the fallout from the UK's dwindling, competitive orchestras. Take icebreaker, for instance, a British 15 piece whose *Femmo!* (Velocity CD 440 443 214) includes cocktails of piccolo/electric guitar/baritone sax (Michael Gordon's *Yo Shakespear!*), guitars/bass/slapping percussion (Daman Le Gassick's *Evil!*). The CD also features a Louis Andriessen hoketus combination of the kind that inspired the group's formation. *De Sneyder!* (Velocity) uses rhythm instruments to exert gravitational attraction on a minimalist riff which is blanching of melody as it unfurls.

Andriessen turns up again — along

with his father Hendrik — on a sampler collection of Dutch Masters *Of The 20th Century* (NM Classics 92093). Old Hendrik's penchant (on *Moor De Penne*) was for a female soprano detailing flagellation, thorny coronation, and general agony in the garden, while the daretmetischief on Louis's *On Jimmy Yoncy* (for jazz ensemble) is dead in line with the current Doopogue.

Another NM disc contains a paranoid 'music drama' by Dutch ex-Missaen pupil Ton De Leeuw, *Antigone* (NM 92036). The discomfort of Antigone, on trial for following instinct instead of societal code, resembles Dreyer's *Passion Of Joan Of Arc*: the protagonist in close up surrounded by a chorus of hostile accusers. I rarely enjoy music performed by classically trained singers, but this jagged setting of angst-ridden Gregorian chant is electric.

More than can be said for Robin Holloway's *Sea-Surface Full Of Clouds* (Chandos CHAN 9228). It's difficult to make up one's mind about Cambridge based Holloway. Often pitifully rotten (he has a teeth grinding obsession with 19th century German romanticism and wears 'Tonality Ties'—T-shirts), he can nevertheless produce vivid, sensuous modernism like the *Second Concerto For Orchestra* (NMCD 15 CD single). But the Chandos recording, of a self-consciously constructed cantata (its intricacies gleefully outlined in the sleeve notes), ultimately points to a great deal of intellect and notation time expended on an unlikely result.

An American composer previously unknown to me, Paul Schoenfield, has done some interesting work with the normally unlovely sounds of American music: half Vaudeville demanded a musical accompaniment that could lurch from cloying sentimentality to seaworthy excitement as an unrelated procession of acts — dancing bears, melancholic singers, knockabout clowns — were wheeled on and dragged off (often with a creak). Schoenfield's large orchestral pieces (*Four Parables*, *Vaudeville Klezmer Rhapsody*, Argo 440 212) explode into colourful, exuberant life but almost at the exact moment they do so, a muscle seems to clench in the

music, as if smarting at a painful memory of lost pleasures. Far more than a jockey Polka collage, the effect is like riding a clanging streetcar through a particular strand of 20th century musical memory. Very listenable.

Michael Nyman's *The Piano Concerto* (Argo 443 382) and Chris Hughes's *Shyt* (Fontana 518 843) appear transparent and empty in the light cast by the Schoenfield disc. The Nyman disc is a concert hall friendly reg of his soundtrack for the Jane Campion movie. Unfortunately, the understatement of the original is here forced to bow to the worst kind of pastoral, chest-swelling English attempt at the grand statement. Chris Hughes was a pop producer in the 60s (we have him to thank for Adam And The Ants' wall of drums), but *Shyt* is a tribute to the music of Steve Reich. Hughes lets his triggers do the talking — sequenced arrangements of bits of *Drumming*, *Violin Phases* and *Pendulum Music*, which seems too easy. Something of a non-event, then — although it's good to hear the first recording of *Slow Motion Bloodred*, where the twining fowl gets timestretched without any change in pitch or timbre.

The Balanescu Quartet have excellent new recordings of two Kevin Volans string quartets on Argo (440 687). *Hunting*, Gathering describes Volans's method: he assembles African traditional music forms and abstracts them into fascinating, deft rhythmic patterns. The Balanescus shine up much more detail than Kronos did on their Nonesuch recording, they play with a tang that conveys the feeling of a deep conversation conducted on the hoof. *The Songlines* (*String Quartet #3*) is earthy, gruff stuff like the Bruce Chatwin novel that inspired it, it's as much about physical landscape as fantasy geography. The quartet turn up again playing the music of Peter Gordon (*Still Life And The Deadman*, New Tone 1298DS17), an American saxophonist whose composed music for a stage work based on George Bataille. Despite executing sleeve notes ("Too often the sex comes off as a goofus"), this is well worth checking out. — Awareness' sounds like Lutoslawski writing for a 60s Hollywood spear 'n' sandal epic. □

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letters

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East-West accord

Congratulations to the first issue (*The Wire* 121) by new editor Mr Herrington. I'm very touched by your Editor's idea (of course, by the issue itself).

I've got a very familiar feeling to *The Wire* because I've been mad about jazz for years and recently much interested in other creative musics.

Now in my integrated home entertainment system there exists Charles Gayle, Balanescu Quartet, Eno, Cabaret Voltaire, Henry Rollins, etc. But *The Wire* is getting much further ahead. Every issue lets me feel somewhat uneasy, and that's exciting for me.

Monodimensional media can't be adventurous anymore. Usual jazz magazines ease my mind. But that's all there is to it. I don't want to forget the spirit of improvisation. *The Wire*

has got it.

Ken Inamura, Hiroshima, Japan

Baker streets ahead

In his review of Bruce Weber's film about Chet Baker, *Let's Get Lost* (*The Wire* 120), David Emmer refers to Baker as managing "to stay alive for 58 years but [he] failed to maintain the creativity he demonstrated in his early twenties." He goes on by saying that the loss of "Baker's teeth in a street fight in 1968 [it was 1966, actually] made it difficult for him to play his trumpet properly, and the effect is a pale reminder of what he was once capable of."

I suspect that Mr Emmer has got in touch with the last period of Baker's music only by watching the film, without ever listening to the best of his later productions or without ever catching him live in concert on a

good night. I agree that the music in the film is unsatisfactory, but Mr Emmer is mistaken when he says that "[Baker's] iconic, flat-cheeked face quickly turned him into a cult hero." On the contrary, what made Chet a myth was the unique, creative way he was able to play trumpet without repeating himself. Again Mr Emmer doesn't get the point when he states that "with Baker one suspects that the image took over and so the music suffered." No, Mr Emmer, Chet Baker's music sometimes suffered because of his impermanent lifestyle. In his later years, when his psycho-physical condition reached the right balance, his trumpet conveyed beauty and depth.

To judge Baker's music of the 70s and 80s on the basis of what can be heard in Bruce Weber's film is to misinform readers about a great artist and one of the most sensitive

and sincere jazz poets of the 20th century.

Maurizio Po, Modena, Italy

Wired for sound

Opening the magazine this month, I discovered that I had heard of 52.1 per cent of the musicians whose albums were featured in Soundcheck. This is my highest score since Richard Cook packed it in as editor. Are you slipping? Or am I getting more weird, sorry wired?

Bob Cornwell, Middlesex

Frank unzapped

Re Zappa letter, *The Wire* 121. Is it really necessary to print letters from blockheads who got stuck in the Watford Gap?

Wolf-Dieter Winkler, Hamburg, Germany

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